

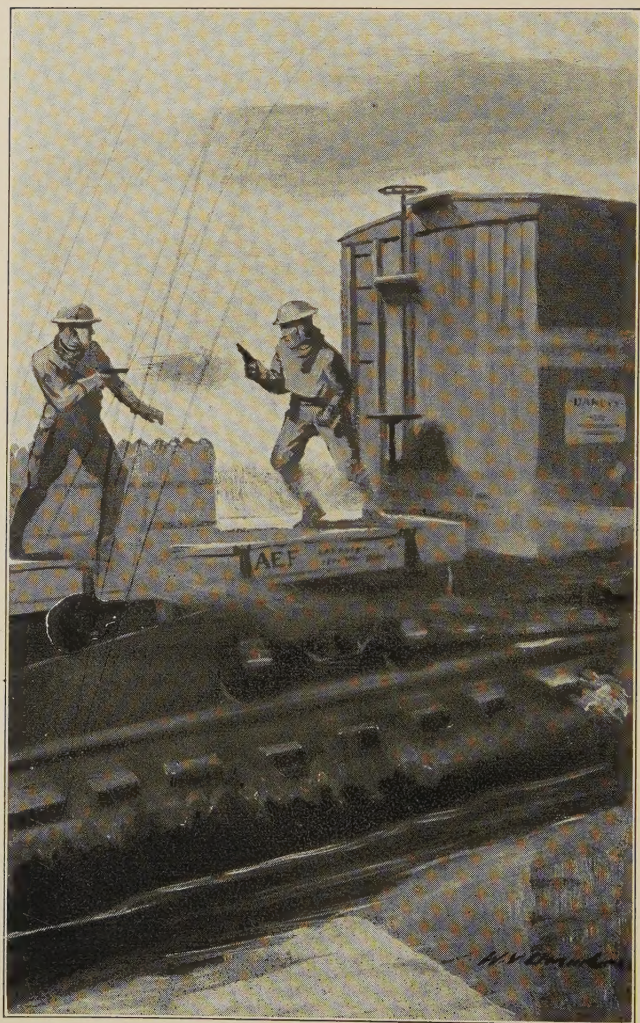
The BRIGHTON BOYS with the ENGINEERS at CANTIGNY







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THE SHARP SNAP OF A REVOLVER SHOT SANG OUT

The BRIGHTON BOYS With THE ENGINEERS AT CANTIGNY

**BY
LIEUTENANT JAMES R. DRISCOLL**

ILLUSTRATED

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The Brighton Boys With the Engineers At Cantigny

CHAPTER I

A PAIR OF WINNERS

LESS than two minutes remained to play!

Brighton was playing football with her ancient and most hated rival—Kingsessing—in the annual Thanksgiving Day game. About the field of play were grouped ten thousand football “fans” cheering their favorites in the fray.

The south stand was a mass of flaming red and white—the colors of Kingsessing—dotted here and there with hugh yellow chrysanthemums worn by the fair rooters. Fifteen hundred loyal supporters of Kingsessing, the student body of the upstate school, their alumni and friends, who had swept into Winchester just before noon in a special train, occupied the center of the huge grandstand.

Across the field, banked row on row in the north stand, a temporary structure that had been set up for the occasion on the academy running track, were the loyal sons of Brighton, their alumni and supporters. Above the sea of happy faces floated old Gold and Blue, the colors of Brighton.

Out on the turf in front of each rival stand were the cheer-leaders, while-sweatered and wielding huge megaphones, exhorting their cohorts in joyous school yells. From the south stand came the old defiant:

“Kingsessing rah-rah, Kingsessing rah-rah,
Horrah, horrah, Kingsessing rah-rah!”

In answering echo came the tumultuous answer of Brighton, the old familiar yell that for many years had encouraged the wearers of the Gold and Blue in their athletic contests:

“Brighton, Brighton,
Keep on fighting.”

A crisp November wind out of the northwest swept the chalk-lined gridiron where twenty-two sturdy school boys surged back and forth, now attacking, now defending their separate goal lines. The sun was

obscured behind a mass of heavy gray clouds. Light flurries of snow were driven across the battlefield as the game drew on to a finish, pelting alike the gladiators in the arena and the cheering spectators. It was an ideal setting for the great American autumnal sport.

For sixteen years Brighton and King-sessing had met on Thanksgiving Day. Coming at the close of their football schedules, fought with all the fury of a championship contest, it had come to be regarded as "the" game of the season. By a coincidence each school had taken seven Thanksgiving Day contests during the period of athletic relations. Two games had resulted in even scores, one of them a scoreless tie. The winner today could break the sixteen year tie.

Slightly outweighed by their rivals Brighton had put up a wonderful game in the first half. Defending the west goal the Winchester team had enjoyed the advantage of the strong wind at their backs during the first period. Bob Grier, the diminutive little quarterback and field general of the Brighton eleven, had used excellent judgment in calling upon Charlie Wharton, the elongated fullback—known affectionately among his

school chums as "Chick" Wharton—to punt on nearly every first down.

A schoolboy wonder who could average forty and fifty yards with his kicks in an ordinary game, Chick had been booting the pigskin sixty and sixty-five yards with the breeze at his back. The result had been that Brighton, although a lighter team, had been able slowly but surely to force the ball toward Kingsessing's goal.

No score had resulted in this first period, and when the two teams changed sides during the two minutes intermission Brighton found herself starting the second period driving full into the northwest gale. Kingsessing now held the advantage of the wind.

But Bobbie Grier, the Brighton field general, was equal to the occasion. In fact, it was due to his good judgment that the stage now was set for the Academy's spectacular play. By sticking to the kicking game in the first period when he had the wind at his back Bob now had his men virtually fresh for the gruelling assault on the heavy Kingsessing line and sterling secondary line of defense.

It was now Brighton's ball on Kingsessing's 34-yard line as play was resumed for the

second quarter. Three tries at the impregnable defense of the Kingsessing forwards—a center smash and two off tackle plays—had availed about four yards in all. It was now a fourth down and six yards to go. In this extremity Chick Wharton had dropped back as though to attempt a field goal; but instead, taking the ball from the center on a quick pass and running directly across the field, he had wheeled suddenly and forward passed superbly to Dannie Harrington, the Brighton left end. The latter, eluding the Kingsessing defense, had caught the ball and scampered across the goal line for the first score of the game.

It was a magnificent play that had outwitted the visiting team and given Brighton first blood! The touchdown had been made at the extreme corner of the field and Dannie Harrington had been tackled there e'er he could plant the ball directly behind the goal posts. Unfortunately for Brighton the punt-out, whirled along by the harassing breeze, had been muffed and Brighton had lost the chance to boost her score to 7 points by a goal from touchdown.

Although both teams had fought splendidly throughout the remainder of the first half

no further score had resulted. The score for half time was Kingssessing, 0; Brighton, 6.

During the fifteen minutes intermission the rival grandstands had engaged in a duel of songs and cheers, the academy rooters taunting the "enemy" by standing and singing "Fair Brighton," winding up with a yell that ended with the students counting out the six points of their score:

"One—two—three—four—five—six—Brighton!"

But something had happened in the Kingssessing dressing rooms during the intermission. "Andy" Brown, head coach of the visitors, known among the school athletic fraternity as "Go-get-'em-Andy," had laid on the oratorical whip with good effect. Consequently, Kingssessing came out for the second half completely cured of stage-fright and primed for a finish fight.

Taking the ball on the kickoff the visitors wasted no time in further formalities but opened up immediately a dynamic battering attack against the lighter Brighton line that was not to be denied. First through center, then off tackle, with an occasional end run, Kingssessing smashed straight down the field. Several times they were set back by fumbles,

but by consistent playing, Garry Cochran, their fullback, went over for a touchdown just before time was called for the third quarter.

The touchdown tied the score at 6—6. Breathlessly the crowd awaited the attempted goal from touchdown. The one additional point might mean victory for Kingsessing; failure might give Brighton the satisfaction of a tied score, at least. But square and true, Archie Sterrett, the Kingsessing quarterback, lifted the ball between the goal posts for a goal, and the scoreboard on the gymnasium now read:

“Kingsessing, 7; Brighton, 6.”

Two plays followed the return of the kick-off before time was called for the third quarter. Things now seemed dark for Brighton. The academy boys were playing desperately and their supporters were rooting more ardently than ever. But the odds seemed all against them. Kingsessing now had the wind in her favor and could play a “waiting” game if she choose. Brighton was wearing down under the relentless attacks of the heavier Kingsessing backs.

The whistle blew—the game was on for the final period. It was Kingsessing’s ball

on her own 40-yard line. Again the punting game, but this time the visitors gaining on every exchange despite Chick Wharton's valiant efforts to drive the pigskin against the gale. Ten minutes of play and King-sessing had worked the ball inside Brighton's 40-yard line.

Now the visitors changed their tactics. They weere out for another touchdown.

"We want another touchdown," their rooters began chanting in unison.

A crash off tackle gave the mammoth Garry Cochran a five yard gain and King-sessing was wild with joy. Two more drives into center and it was a first down for King-sessing on Brighton's 30-yard line. King-sessing was reckless now with the joy of expectant victory. On the next lineup her team spread out for a forward pass.

But something happened. As Sterrett, the visiting quarter, shot the ball across the line of scrimmage, it fell, not in the arms of a Kingsessing player, but was snatched instead by a player whose jersey was of blue with gold sleeve stripes. Quick as a flash the Brighton player was off with an open field before him.

"Its little Bobbie Grier—O boy!" came

the triumphant cry from the Brighton stands.

Sure enough, the diminutive Brighton quarter had intercepted the ball, and was scampering down the field as fast as his short legs could carry him. The Brighton stands were wild by now, while every flag in the Kingessing stand dropped and every voice was still.

"A touchdown," came the shout from the Brighton crowd. The academy substitutes were waving their blankets like mad.

But something else happened. Another figure merged into the picture. It was Hal Green, Kingessing's crack 10-second man, a star on the gridiron as well as the cinders. He was closing in now on Bob Grier in a stern chase. The two figures sped over the chalkmarks. In another moment Green closed in and with a magnificent flying tackle brought down the racing Brighton quarter amid the spasmodic cheers of the reawakened Kingessing stand. A vocal volcano swept the field as the two teams came racing to their new positions and lined up for the next play. A whistle blew.

"Two minutes to play!" the umpire announced to the players.

Now Brighton had the ball on Kingsessing's 22-yard line—only four chalk-marks from a score and victory! But it seemed a forlorn hope. Her supporters were in a frenzy of joy, however, and calling insistently for a score that would wrest victory from the visiting team.

Bravely the tired Brighton backs assailed the heavy Kingsessing line. A try at center—no gain. A smash off right tackle—a scant yard gain. In desperation Bob Grier tried a trick double pass on the third down. But it was smothered by the alert visitors before it got fairly started. It was now the last down—and nine yards to go!

"28—9—44—16—3!" sang out quarterback Grier.

"Forty four." An even double number was the signal for a goal from placement! It seemed all too futile against the stiff wind, but, after all, a dying chance with less than half a minute to play.

Little Bob Grier knelt to receive the ball; big Chick Wharton moved back quickly into position to make the try. Like panthers the rest of the Brighton team set themselves to protect the pair from the onrushing visitors.

"Break it up"—came the cry from the Kingsessing stand.

Zip! the ball came back from the center. To the Brighton rooters it seemed an eternity as quarterback Grier grabbed the ball out of the air and nervously set it on end. Then all was a blur from the sidelines as the King-sessing forwards came smashing through the line just as Chick Wharton stepped forward to set his right toe against the pigskin.

Thus! the impact between ball and shoe was plainly audible on the sidelines. Then the ball lifted in the air over the line of scrimmage. A dozen hands were raised to intercept it and a driving wind held it back—yet it traveled on under the momentum given it by Chick Wharton's last desperate kick.

"Its going to hit a goal post," shouted a Kingsessing substitute. And so it appeared for a moment. But just as a groan set up from the Brighton stand the fickle wind bore the revolving spheroid sharply upward—and over the white goal directly between the posts!

Quickly the score was put up: "King-sessing, 7; Brighton, 9."

CHAPTER II

SPEECHES AND ADIEUS

NOT a Brighton warrior escaped the mob that surged on the field. Eager hands pounced upon Chick Wharton—the idol of the hour—for his marvelous goal from placement, and in short order he was borne aloft upon the shoulders of his schoolmates. Likewise, Bob Grier, the diminutive quarterback, whose excellent judgment in directing plays, accurate forward passing and unerring skill in holding the ball for Wharton's remarkable boot, was boosted above the procession. Then started a snake dance.

In front of the south stand where sat the loyal rooters of Kingssessing the Brighton paraders stopped at last to raise a mighty cheer in honor of their vanquished foe—the honored guests within the gate. It was given with a will—the Brighton “locomotive”—with three long “rahs” for Kingssessing. In response came the battle cry

of the invaders—defeated but undismayed—and chanting about “next time.”

And then, while the great crowd melted away, and the Kingssessing partisans retreated like a straggling army to the Winchester depot, the standard-bearers of Brighton, bruised and begrimed by the struggle, were carried away to the gymnasium, there to be stood up in the dressing room—every last man of the victorious squad—until he had “come across” with a speech.

It had been a great and glorious victory—all the more illustrious by reason of the fact that until the last few moments of play Kingssessing seemed destined to carry off the laurels of the day. Every man of the team was a hero in the eyes of the academy student body: Chick Wharton, the big-hearted fullback who had kicked the goal; Bob Grier, captain of the team, whose spectacular run after intercepting a forward pass had turned the tide of defeat toward victory; Bill Harrington who had made the first touchdown—in fact, every man who had assisted in the great victory.

As the dinner gong sounded summoning the students into the dining hall, and the football heroes filed in to take their places

at the training table in the east end of the salon, the hubbub of the ball field was renewed. A torrent of handclapping and a veritable rebel yell greeted the team that had fought so gamely and won so handsomely. The gridiron gladiators took their seats under a drapery of American and Allied flags, Brighton banners in old Gold and Blue, and high above all the football that had been cuffed about in the day's game with Kingsessing. Following the custom of years the numerals of the score with Kingsessing had been painted on the pigskin; after the dinner it would be tucked away in the academy trophy room to remind future classes at Brighton of the wonderful victory.

Thanksgiving Day at Brighton always was a gala affair. After the big afternoon game dinner was served at 6:30, and a very special occasion it was. Usually it resolved itself into a semi-informal family affair. Headmaster Welsh presided as toastmaster and called upon various members of the faculty, the leaders in various student activities and honored guests to make impromptu little speeches.

To the men of the football squad the dinner meant a lot more than to other students—and

for a very particular reason. After sitting three months at the training table, eating only the plainest of foods under the direction of the athletic director, Thanksgiving Day meant the breaking of training—once more the privilege of eating candy, cake and other good things tabooed by the trainer. All in all, it was a happy crowd that sat down to the dinner.

Soon it was over. The pumpkin pie and the crullers had been served and, amid the tinkle of demitasse spoons against delicate coffee cups, headmaster Welsh arose to speak. The care-free spirit of the occasion, the joy over victory, were the keynotes of his opening remarks.

As he proceeded, however, his speech drifted inevitably into that one theme that overshadowed all else this year; that intruded in the class room, upon the athletic field, or in the study hall—the great war into which the United States had been whirled. From rejoicing over their football victory, from boisterous laughter and the joys of comfort, from the tables of plenty, the picture was changed in a moment under the spell of the master orator to the trenches of Europe where the boys from America now were

fraternizing—yes, yielding their blood with the poilus of France and the Tommies of England; to the devastated homes of Belgium and France, of stricken Rumania and Serbia; to the thousands of chill and desolate homes where stricken families sat crying for bread and warmth; to the great open spaces of the sea where men were going down to death in the wrecks of smitten ships.

Hushed now was the long dining room. Every face, drawn and tense, was turned attentively to the well-beloved headmaster as he began relating Brighton's part in that grim struggle. Yes, her sons had gone forth gladly from the first American call to duty. Not only the contingent of students who had left the academy to go "over there," but the great long list of alumni who had gone into the service. From his records headmaster Welsh had compiled a list; this he now read to the students.

It was truly a remarkable record for the little academy at Winchester. Standing well inland from the metropolitan centers of the Atlantic seaboard, the school drew its students from all the little towns and villages of the busy agricultural district of which the city of Winchester was the center. Here

were youths preparing for college—slightly under the draft limit. Here were the manifestations of that patriotism and devotion to the ideals of the United States of America that mark the quiet, deep-moving channels of national life away from the glamour and artificiality of the city. Here was democracy—shorn of all veneer.

Cheers swept the dining room as headmaster Welsh concluded the recital of Brighton's contribution to the world war. In a moment it became an ovation. Brighton's siren yell rang out shrilly from the assembled throng of diners as they leaped to their feet as with one accord and began waving their napkins. As the cry toned down Professor Everett started the national anthem and in a moment the "Star Spangled Banner" was being given with just that reverence and devotion that a body of American students can put in the rendition of the immortal lines of Francis Scott Key.

And now, following the custom of years, the students began calling for their favorites. First of all came little Bob Grier—"Rabbit" as his pals affectionately knew him. Volatile, quick-witted, bright and clean, the happy young football captain held his auditors

at close attention while he detailed the fall football campaign that had ended so gloriously with the overwhelming defeat of the old rival—Kingsessing.

It was Bob's senior year. In the spring he would graduate and go forth from Brighton to college. Throughout his four years' course at the academy he had been a popular and highly respected leader among his chums. As president of the senior class, as one of the honor men scholastically, he could fight as hard—and did fight—to uphold the glory and honor of Brighton in the class room as he could on the gridiron. Everybody liked him; every one was pleased to know that "Bob's team" had whipped Kingsessing in the Thanksgiving game.

Every few minutes the youth was interrupted in his impromptu speech by rounds of handclapping. But, of a sudden, the happy school throng was stilled as Bob paused awkwardly for a moment.

"Keep it up, Rabbit," came the cry.

For a moment Bob looked about him whimsically, and then continued:

"Now that we have whipped our old enemy—Kingsessing—I am going out to fight the real enemy in the real game. I-I-am

going out to—buck the line for Uncle Sam. I'm going to help the boys from the U. S. A. rush the ball across the Rhine and make a touchdown on the Unter den Linden in Berlin!"

He got no further, for the applause was deafening. From one end of the dining hall to the other, students, guests and sedate members of the faculty leaped to their feet in a riot of enthusiasm.

"Three cheers for Rabbit Grier," sang out Eddie Shaffer, the sophomore president, and, needless to say, they were given with a hearty will. When finally the outburst simmered down a bit and Bob had an opportunity to conclude his little football speech he added, in a few candid words, that he had decided to enlist and would probably enter the service of the government within a few days. As he took his seat again several of his chums hastened to congratulate him upon his decision; the banquet room buzzed with the murmur of many voices.

At this juncture several strident voices began calling for Chick Wharton.

"Give us Wharton," they called. The cry was taken up and resounded up and down the dining room until it became the clamor

of several score voices. In response to the din the lanky varsity fullback—he who had kicked the famous goal of the afternoon that had given Brighton the victory over Kingsessing—untangled his long legs under the table and stumbled to his feet.

Now Chick could kick a football, play first base like a Jake Daubert and hurl his elongated form over the cross bar at six feet in the high jump; but there was one thing Chick could not do—and that was make a speech. On the athletic field this stalwart six-foot youth could rattle off a line of talk that made the opposition quail under the wrath of his sharp tongue; but when it came to a stated speech before an assemblage he was completely lost.

“You fellows know I’d sooner take a licking than try this,” he drawled by way of introduction after the applause had subsided.

In broken sentences, punctuated by long pauses, the tall upstanding youth stammered his appreciation of the reception accorded him and tried to explain that kicking the goal that whipped Kingsessing had been “just a little thing in the line of duty that any other chap would have done under the circumstances.”

He was about to sit down awkwardly as though glad to escape further the ordeal of speech-making when for a moment he clutched the back of his chair and turned to say:

"You heard what chum—I mean Mr. Grier told you—about going to play a new kind of game. Well, same goes for me. Bob and I have cast our lots together. We are going in together."

Another demonstration ensued. His speech coming directly on the heels of Bob Grier's announcement, stirred up another patriotic carnival. Some one started "Fair Brighton" and it was taken up instantly, swelling into a grand chorus.

Several other speeches followed and then the great Thanksgiving dinner was concluded with a toast proposed by headmaster Welsh—a toast to the sons of Brighton already "over there," or in the training camps at home.

Immediately, amid the clatter of moving chairs and the scurry of many feet, Chick and Bob found themselves surrounded by a group of admiring friends.

"Have you enlisted yet?" "What branch of service did you enter?" "When are you going away?" and a half-dozen other ques-

tions were hurled at the pair in rapid succession.

Bob managed to get control of the situation long enough to explain that he and Chick had talked it over for a long time and had decided that immediately upon the close of the football season they would leave Brighton and don the uniform of their country.

"We haven't decided yet which service," he told them, "but it will probably be either aviation or the engineer corps."

Chick Wharton managed to get in a word.

"Wherever we go we stick together," he said slowly.

Chick and Bob had come to Brighton together and had roomed together now continuously during the four years of their school life. "Mutt and Jeff," some of their friends called them: Chick tall and angular; Bob short and stocky in build.

"Anyhow, we are going home for the weekend and may not come back Monday at all," continued Bob.

"How's that?" chimed in Dan Shields, who played right tackle on the eleven and was a likely candidate for captain.

"Most likely enlist and keep right on going," remarked Bob energetically.

CHAPTER III

“WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?”

BRIGHT and early next morning, before the arising bell sounded, Chick and Bob were up with their alarm clock and off in a hurry to catch the early morning train that would bear them homeward. Headmaster Welsh had granted a number of the football heroes a week end's vacation as a reward for their athletic devotion during the fall. Chick and Bob had decided to take advantage of the opportunity to slip away. In fact, they had a serious reason for wanting to get home at this particular time. What they had told their friends at the banquet the previous evening was only too true—they were going into the service.

Back in the summer they had cherished a long ambition to enlist. Just before the academy opened in September they had about decided to make the plunge. Much against the wishes of their parents they had planned to slip away to the nearest recruiting station. But just at that time there had come to Bob a

letter from Sol Merriman, Brighton's famous athletic director, expressing the high hope that Bob and Chick would be back at Brighton for the new football season.

"You two veterans are the nucleus of our team this year, and I want to get you both going in good shape early in the season," he had written, adding: "Be sure to arrive in Winchester a day or so prior to the opening of school.

Some how or other the call could not be resisted. On one hand Brighton urged her boys to get back into the fray for the Blue and the Gold. On the other hand came the still small voice of patriotic duty backed up everywhere by the flaming Red, White and Blue posters of Uncle Sam pointing his finger directly out of the bill board and saying "I need you."

In the end the two old chums had decided to go back to Brighton for the fall term. Since they were under the draft age and would go purely as volunteers, the boys figured out that the three months at Brighton would make little difference. The older boys would fill up the cantonments; after Thanksgiving the government would be proceeding more rapidly in its big task of molding a national

army, and would be in a better position, with equipment and instruction, to take on more recruits.

"What do you say, chum?" Chick had asked. "Go back and shoot a few more goals for Brighton?"

Bob had readily agreed.

"I hate like the mischief to miss this fall's schedule, especially after the fellows were good enough to elect me captain of this year's team," he had added.

"That settles it: back to Brighton for us," Chick had responded.

And so, back to Brighton they had gone. Through all the three months of gridiron battles, of careful physical training and weekly battles for the glory and honor of their alma mater, Bob and Chick had kept to themselves their dual pact. From that first day of school in September right through until this Thanksgiving Day game with Kingsessing they had held true to their determination to embark at once in the service of their country.

And now they were going ahead with their plans—quietly but with grim intention to get right down to brass tacks immediately with Uncle Sam.

"Probably won't get back here for some

time," said Chick, as he bolted down the stairway of the dormitory with his chum right at his heels, each tugging a suitcase.

Bob was whistling softly "We're going over."

"Reckon we'll stop back in Winchester on our way to the city after we sign up—just long enough to give the fellows a handshake," countered Bob.

Although they had yet to go through the formalities of enlistment, each lad felt mortally sure he would stand the test. Each was in fine physical form and inured to a strenuous life in the service because of their years of youth spent in the open country of their home valley along the banks of the picturesque Nippono river that skirted the majestic Blue Ridge mountains.

"You mean if we get through all right," chattered Chick as he hurled his elongated form through the swinging door that led outward onto the campus.

"Righto, chum: but I guess we stand a pretty good chance," replied Bob with a grin.

They were heading down the campus at a lively pace. Looking down from his lofty six feet-two upon his short but sturdy pal Chick suppressed a hearty guffaw that broke off

short as he rammed his free right fist into his mouth.

"I'm not so sure about—about—er—rabbits the size of you," Chick drawled.

"That so!" shot back Bob rather seriously. "Good goods always come in little packages," he philosophized.

"Speaking about poisons?" ventured Chick mischievously, and screened his face with his suitcase to avoid his chum's pretended uppercut.

In gay spirits the two athletic lads skipped out the campus gate and beat it at ten-second speed for a trolley car just rounding the corner that would carry them to the depot.

In a few more minutes, after a hurried dash across Winchester to the railway terminal and a ten-minute session with a cup of coffee and a plate of hotcakes and sausage, the Brighton boys swung aboard the 7:10 train that would carry them to Chesterton—their home town. It was a good three hours' ride and the lads settled themselves comfortably with the morning newspapers to read the war news.

Chesterton, the little city from whence Bob Grier and Chick Wharton had gone to Brighton, was a railroad town. Located strategically as the terminal of two con-

necting railway lines, it was essentially a railroad center, although many other industries had grown up in time to supplement the activities of the railway shops and big yards.

The Chesterton & Western tapped rich coal fields and its tonnage was in greater part composed of the great stores of bituminous unearthed in the hilly country through which the line extended. Furthermore, it connected at its western terminal with other lines spreading out to the lake region in the north and further down to the western lines of the middle west.

At Chesterton the C. & W. connected with the Upland Valley which was a through line direct to tidewater on the Atlantic coast. The heavy coal haul coming in from the north and west over the C. & W. was transferred to the Upland Valley at Chesterton, and thus the importance of that city as a railway center enhanced.

Huge shops for the repair and maintenance of locomotives, cars and all rolling stock had grown up at that point. This twin terminal for the two connecting lines made it the home for hundreds of sturdy men in overalls who composed the crews of the scores of trains that arrived or departed daily from Chesterton

over the two divisions. Nearly a hundred miles of track were laid out in the giant storage yard where the thousands of cars from the C. & W. were transferred to the Upland Valley. Chesterton was a hustling young city that counted its prosperity in crisp bank notes every fortnightly payday and knew no other schedule than steady work from one year's end to another. It was a typical American city of hustle, thrift and energy.

In such a town Bob Grier and Chick Wharton had been born and raised. Their fathers had long been identified with the Chesterton & Western. Coming to the employ of the railroad as a young man Bob's father had started as a telegrapher in the central offices and worked himself eventually into the train despatcher's office and thence onward until he had landed now in the office of division superintendent. Bob was an only son. His father was ambitious to see him take up electrical engineering and had sent him away to Winchester that the boy might prepare at Brighton for the big state university.

Chick Wharton's father had had a harder row to hoe in the railway service but after long years of faithful service had been rewarded now with a position at the top of the heap.

Born in the rich agricultural district in which Chesterton was situated and educated in the little old red school house at the country road corners the elder Wharton had come into Chesterton as a young man at the time when the foundations of the great railway system were being laid. Starting as an oiler and roundhouse assistant the stalwart Wharton had landed a job later on as a fireman. Through more than thirty years consecutive service he had served as freight and passenger engineer on the C. & W. until he was known all over the division as "Pluck" Wharton, the engineer. Everyone along the line knew and loved the big smiling-faced engineer; and everyone was glad now that he had been graduated from the locomotive to the position of road foreman of engines with supervision over all the locomotives on the division.

From childhood the sons of these two railroad men had grown up together. Of the same age, they had started in public school together and chummed along through the grades to the Chesterton High school. Together they had played on the high school football and baseball teams, and each was an athletic star. When Bob Grier decided to enter Brighton and take a course there in prepara-

tion for college nothing was more natural than that Chick Wharton should plan to go along. Chick's father would have been satisfied to see his son get right to work on the C. & W. after completing high school and become a regular "chip of the old block;" but the mother wanted her boy to go forward and get all the education possible before settling down to the stern realities of life. And she had won the day—along with Bob Grier, who had put in a few good words with the elder Wharton apropos of the desirability of every young man getting a thorough education to properly equip himself for the competition of the world of today.

In this environment of locomotives, freight and box cars, the two boys had grown up. Not a man on all the C. & W. but knew Bob Grier and Chick Wharton. Not a crew running into Chesterton over the Upland Valley, either, but got a friendly salutation from the two boys when they were home from school. In the giant roundhouse that sheltered the panting locomotives as they came in from their long hauls the boys knew every engine-wiper, every hostler, helper and callboy. Hardly a freight caboose in all the huge storage yard but what had been graced by the lads

in their rambles and regaled with stories of life at Brighton.

It was but natural that the boys should come naturally by a lot of intimate railroad knowledge. As a boy Chick had known the thrill of climbing into his father's seat in the locomotive and grasping the long shining throttle. Bob, too, through his association with the family had known what it was to throw the reverse lever or "slip her some sand." Many a veteran fireman had enjoyed a laugh as one or the other of the boys worked off a bit of surplus energy and enthusiasm shoveling coal into the firebox.

In high school days Chick and Bob had put in a vacation or two working as callboys. The work was easy. Riding a bicycle they called at the homes of the railroaders to tell them when they were to report for duty. Wharton, when he decided to enter Brighton, had worked the first summer in the erecting shops until school opened, thereby earning a tidy sum toward tuition. Bob Grier had traveled the road many a time in the special private car that was allotted to his father as division superintendent: and he had had Chick many times as his guest. Thus the two lads, each bent upon an engineering edu-

cation, had found an excellent opportunity to learn the rudiments of the great game of transportation. Each had acquired a fundamental knowledge of railroads and everything that pertained to their operation and maintenance.

Now life called to a fuller service than either had ever anticipated. War . . . the great world war . . . the need of every man proud of his country and able to perform some service. Here they were homeward bound determined to get right into the thick of it as quickly as possible. Where? How? What line of service? These were the questions to be settled; these the thoughts uppermost in their minds as they drew close to their old home-town.

"Mind now," Bob ejaculated nervously to his chum, "its either aviation or the navy for us."

"You bet your sweet life," answered Chick. "I'm right with——"

He was interrupted by their old friend "Slim" Stonebraker, brakeman of No. 33, the train on which they were homeward bound. "Slim" came up behind them and leaned over the back of their seat.

"D'ya hear the the news, fellows?" he queried.

"What news?" both boys put in with the same breath.

"They're recruiting railroad crews for service in France," answered the brakeman. "Whole regiments of railroad men to be sent over for service in France. Engineers, firemen, trainmen, shopmen, repairmen,—in fact the whole railway outfit. Our fellows is to help operate the French railways and build new ones for Uncle Sam. What do you think of that? Yanks of the headlights and steel rails to carry our army over the Hindenburg line into Germany!"

It was news to the boys and they made eager inquiries of "Slim" ere he ran off to attend his duties now that the train had slowed down into the terminal.

The boys scrambled out of their seats and started for the door. Bob was leading the way, when of a sudden he felt a resounding whack on his right shoulder. It was his old chum Chick with one of his familiar "pats."

"Gosh all hemlock—I've solved the riddle! Holy smoke, boy, now I've got it," he howled in high glee.

"Got what?" exclaimed Bob as he freed himself of his big chum's shoulder bearhug.

CHAPTER IV

A "CLEAR BLOCK" AT HOME

I'VE settled our hash—determined on 'Where do we go from here boy'," laughed Chick.

For the moment Bob was a "bonehead."

"Wake up," his chum yelled. "Did you hear what Slim said? War Department picking railroad chaps for service over there?"

Bob shook his head, still in a maze. Chick was about ready to get mad now.

"Why, doggone your pictures, aren't you wise?" he began. "American railroad chaps going over to wreck the Kaiser's special and put France back on her wheel bases again. Don't you get it yet? You and I all teamed up to leave Brighton and get into the game. . . . Not quite decided what we'll do. And now, maybe we get a chance to ring the bell and whistle for the crossing somewhere in France?" . . .

By now Bob had it full and plenty.

"Yea, bo, I get you," he hurrahed. "You mean you and yours truly get aboard with the

railroad bunch and when Uncle Sam gives us a clear block we pull open the throttle and start 'em rolling over the river Rhine?"

"Righto; your drivers are making sixty revolutions to the minute now," chirped his chum.

Could they do it? This was the picture in their mind as they clambered down out of the train. In that instant they had a vision of a faraway railroad line in France; great long trains hauling the American troops and supplies from the seaports to the bases of operations inland; themselves employed in some capacity they might earn by reason of their railroad experience.

"What do you say, chum?" asked Wharton as they swung out on the car platform.

"Great!" shot back Bob, his eyes aglow. "I'm with you on that: it's settled now for sure. Next thing on the program is to find out how we can put it across."

As they jumped to the platform Slim Stonebraker came hurrying up from the other end of the Pullman.

"True, fellows: its all the news here in Chesterton," he began. "Sixty employes of the Chesterton & Western are going out within a week. Upland Valley has enough coming

down the line to fill up a company. That's to be the first bunch from here."

Chick turned to Bob with a significant glance and the latter answered with a knowing smile. With a friendly nod they turned away from the brakeman after several more questions.

"Good for old C. & W.," laughed Wharton. "You can count on our boys being there every time."

Bob was keyed right up to the newborn inspiration within his mind.

"Yes, and you can count on us being there too when that midnight choo-choo leaves for old Berlin," he countered.

Whereat the boys fell into a diligent conversation over the news of the railroad unit about to leave Chesterton, and, without further parley, forthwith agreed they were destined to a place in that company, and would pry their way into it if they had to ride the bumpers like the penurious hobo.

"Come on, lets run up and see the governor for a moment," sang out Bob above the din of hissing steam and clanging bells in the big railway terminal.

Vaulting into the interior of the massive building that combined the union depot of

the two connecting railroads and the general division headquarters of the Chesterton & Western the two youths eased themselves into an elevator and shot up to the fifth floor where they emerged presently before a white frosted door bearing the title: "Division Superintendent."

"Dad in yet?" Bob asked of Mose, the white-haired old colored man who had been in the employe of the C. & W. "eber since de rebellion and den some," and who now was custodian of the superintendent's front door.

The fine old colored man rolled his eyes at sound of a familiar voice and grasped the extended palms of the two boys.

"Reckon he is, Marse Robert," he drawled. "Ebrybody hoppin' round right lively dese war days."

Tapping on the door Bob opened it cautiously and peered inside.

"Well, upon my soul, where did you come from?" exclaimed the startled parent as he jumped up to greet his son. "And you, too, Chick?" as he turned to his son's best pal.

There was a hearty welcome all around.

"We just ran over from Winchester to join up with the C. & W. boys who are going to France," announced Bob with a snap of his jaw.

His father smiled.

"Of all the nerve!" he observed facetiously. "Don't you know they want only experienced railroad men and not boys."

The division superintendent laughed uproariously.

"Never mind, dad, you'll soon find out how serious we are," answered the son. "Guess you know Chick and I haven't been raising cabbages and picking potato bugs all these years. We? Why, we've lived around engines, in cars, on top of roundhouses, under turntables ever since we were knee high to a grasshopper. Railroads? That's us, isn't it Chick?"

Dad had been refusing to take it seriously, but when he heard Wharton's oration—an effort that would have made a creditable showing alongside one of Cicero's best efforts—the division superintendent of the C. & W. realized he had, indeed, something new to think about. The chat was interrupted by the ringing of a buzzer and the announcement of an important caller. With a friendly hand clasp the superintendent bade the boys run along home now to see their mothers. He would see them later in the day. And, O yes, he was mighty proud of the part they had

played in winning the big game from King-sessing. Of course, it had been the first thing he had read in the morning paper, and he would have been at the game except for the urge of business growing out of the war situation.

The boys hurried down to the train floor and out into Market street. It was agreed they would meet again directly after lunch in the terminal and find out all about the railroad bunch leaving Chesterton.

One o'clock found them again together and what better luck than that they should run into Larry O'Neill, an old High School chum, who now was chief rate clerk for the Upland Valley at Chesterton. From him they speedily got full particulars. What Slim Stonebraker had told them was only too true. Washington authorities had decided on sending regiments of American railway employes to France to set up, equip and operate a complete Made-in-America railroad system. Each railway system was to furnish its quota, and Chesterton had been asked to recruit a full company of one hundred men.

"Great! that just suits us," exclaimed Bob. And then he explained to Larry that he and Chick Wharton had decided to leave school

and get into government service, and furthermore, they intended getting in with the Chesterton railroad outfit.

"You ought not to have any trouble about that," countered Larry. "You fellows have grown up here right in these railroad yards and terminals and ought to have an awful eyeful and earful of it by this time."

"That's just it," answered Bob. "And we propose to fight it out on this line if it takes all winter."

O'Neill suggested they get in touch at once with "Uncle" Jim Bennett, the old yard foreman who had been starting trains out of the Chesterton yards for twenty years.

"You mean good old friend Uncle Jim Bennett?" queried Bob.

"What's he got to do with it?" put in Chick before O'Neill could answer.

"First to volunteer and already nominated as captain of the local company," replied the rate clerk.

"Nothing could be better for us," exclaimed Bob as he turned to bounce a friendly fist off his chum's sturdy shoulder.

From the time Bob and Chick had first come into the Chesterton yard as boy "free lances" in short trousers Uncle Jim Bennett had been

one of their best friends. Once, within two years, when Uncle Jim had been hauled "on the carpet" for a costly smashup of freight cars in a mixup of yard traffic the yard foreman had been saved by a friendly word to the division superintendent put in by that official's young son—at least Bennett claimed that had saved the day for him. Consequently, there wasn't a thing he wouldn't do for Bob Grier and his friends.

Immediately they set out up the huge freight yard in quest of Uncle Jim's rendezvous back of the freight scales. Finding that smiling official busy "lifting empties" and "swinging loads" they proceeded to unburden themselves of the great load on their hearts—could they get into the Chesterton company.

"Bless your hearts, boys, nothing would suit me better," was his first sally. "But I'd not be putting down your names until the old O.K. came through from your daddies."

He pointed to a long yellow order blank on his table on which had been scrawled the names of various C. & W. employes signifying their desire to sign up for Uncle Sam's railway service. The boys scanned it eagerly, finding many familiar names.

"Well, just kindly include us in the entries, if you please, while there's yet room and time," said Chick eagerly.

"If you don't we'll—we'll—"

Uncle Jim just grabbed them around the shoulders by way of answer. He had a profound affection for the two "kids" he had known from their birth.

"Bless your young hearts," he smiled. "Just like every boy I know of in America right now—eager to do his bit."

Of course Captain James Bennett would welcome such stalwarts to his company and could find plenty for them to do in the new plan being evolved out of the War Department's order provided they could get the necessary releases at home.

"I'm through here in the tower tomorrow," said Uncle Jim, "and then begin active recruiting of my company. We pull out of here in a week—just as quick as we can get to New York."

So the boys hurried away and spent the afternoon looking up some of the railroad boys who had signed up for the service. From them they got full particulars of the plan at stake and of the qualifications necessary for service. At five o'clock they decided to drop

in on the division superintendent again—the Hon. Robert Grier, Sr.—to give him the “grand ultimatum.”

As they stepped into the elevator Uncle Jim Bennett came hustling into the car out of breath and somewhat excited.

“What’s up?” the boys chorused.

“Sh-h-h!” the veteran yard foreman exclaimed. “Old 87, loaded with valuable overseas freight just ran into a string of empties on No. 9 up in the elbow—spilled all over the yard—fireman and engineer both slightly hurt—an ulgy mess and some one’s to blame.”

Eighty-seven was the big fast freight that came into Chesterton over the Upland Valley every night at five o’clock and rambled right along to tidewater after changing engines and crews. Since the war she had been hauling valuable freight consigned to the armies in Europe.

The boys exchanged startled glances.

“Worst part of it is,” whispered Bennett, “looks like someone purposely threw a switch on her just to ditch her.”

The boys followed the yard foreman into the superintendent’s office.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERIOUS WRECK

BOB'S father was at the telephone, earnestly engaged. From snatches of the conversation the boys gathered that he was talking with some railroad employe in the river bridge signal tower at the other end of the yard regarding the wreck and gathering data necessary to a thorough investigation. Snapping the telephone receiver on the hook he swung his chair to face Uncle Jim Bennett, the yard foreman. The boys moved as though to withdraw, but a beckoning hand detained them.

"Might as well stay around, boys," he suggested, and turned to the foreman.

"Hello, Uncle Jim; nasty mess up there in the yard; any idea how No. 87 came to be ditched," the official asked.

The foreman could throw little light on the situation. He was shaking his head.

"Looks very queer," explained the yard official. "Sam Watson, engineer of 87, is positive he had a white light. Tower tells

us they put 87 down the straight-away as she came over the bridge—they knew up there track No. 7 was loaded with empties. Confound if I know what happened.”

The superintendent explained that he had just been talking with Ernie Poust, the signalman on duty in the tower, with that employe’s sworn statement by wire that the fast freight had been sent down main track as she came into the big railroad yard.

“Looks like some funny work somewhere,” inferred the superintendent impatiently.

“Anybody lurking around up there when 87 hit those empties?” asked the official.

Bennett eyed him curiously.

“Flagman of 87 said he fell over Al Schmidt as he came running forward after the smash-up,” replied the yard foreman.

“Who is Al Schmidt?” asked the superintendent.

“One of the brakemen with the upper end night shifting crew,” answered Bennett.

“How long’s he been around here?”

“About seven months.”

“Where did he come from?”

“Told the roundhouse foreman he was off the Chicago and Mid-Western.”

“Have any conversation with him?”

"No."

The superintendent touched the buzzer button on his desk.

"Mose" stepped into the room.

"Have Al Schmidt, brakeman with upper end night shifting crew, sent up here immediately," directed the superintendent.

While they waited the superintendent and his yard foreman discussed every angle of the wreck. They were at a complete loss to explain the wreck.

"Seems strange to me, with all the safety precautions we take," he complained, "that we've got to have these wrecks every so often. Been seven or eight of them within the last few months right here in this yard."

"Yes, and had you thought that every one of these wrecks has had to do with precious freight consigned for foreign shipment?" added Bennett.

It took some time to locate brakeman Schmidt and bring him to the superintendent's office. But finally he appeared. There was a tap at the door and then Mose ushered him into the superintendent's private office. Cap in hand the brakeman came forward, dressed in overalls and carrying his gauntlet working gloves.

"Yes, Mr. Grier, you wanted me?" Schmidt inquired.

"Good evening, Mr. Schmidt," the superintendent replied. "You doubtless know of the wreck up in the yard?"

"Yes, sir, I was close by; we had just gone up the yard for the night shift. We were over on track No. 6 getting out some perishables for an Upland Valley extra. First I knew of it was when the engineer of 87 threw on his emergency and the sparks began to fly from his driving wheels. Then he crashed right into the rear of those empties. That's all, sir."

"See any suspicious characters around?" asked the superintendent.

"No sir."

"See any one tampering around the switch from main track into No. 9?"

"No sir."

"Any idea what caused that pileup?"

"No sir."

After several more questions the brakeman was excused and bowed his way deferentially out of the room.

"Well, that fellow don't seem to have had any part in it," said the superintendent. "Tells a straight story—anyhow; is there

any reason why he should be suspected of train-wrecking?"

The yard foreman said he had no reason to suspect the brakeman; he had only been around little more than half a year, but had worked faithfully and conducted himself properly.

The great puzzle remained unsolved. There seemed little more to do for the night. Wreck crews were picking up the debris and making traffic clear through the yard. After a few directions to various aides the superintendent slipped into his coat and beckoned the boys to follow him. Chick was to go home for supper with the Griers. Word to that effect was sent to his home.

That night a great session was held in the library of the Grier home. For the moment the wreck was forgotten. The big issue at hand was the fact that the two boys had made it plain they intended to get into the world war. The whole situation was thoroughly gone into in that "closed conference," and in the end it turned out—a victory for the boys.

"And since you both are determined to go I see no reason why you should not go over with the C. & W. bunch," announced the superintendent.

So far as Chick Wharton was concerned his parents had gladly approved the suggestion after a brief consultation; indeed, they were proud of their boy's patriotism, and only expressed the hope they would be able to arrange an enlistment with the boys from Chesterton who were going into an engineering regiment.

"And that's exactly the way we'll fix it," said the superintendent as Chick arose to go. "You be over at the terminal at 9.30 in the morning. In the meantime I'll have a talk with Uncle Jim Bennett, who is to take our local bunch away."

The two Brighton boys were too happy for words. Chick, six feet one and lanky; Bob, short and stocky, joined hands and did a regular ring-around-the-rosey before saying goodnight.

Next morning found them on the job after breakfast. All was feverish excitement around the terminal. Uncle Jim Bennett had hung his cap in the yard office up in the scales—until after the war, he told his old friends there—and now was in charge of an impromptu recruiting station in the C. & W. terminal. First of all he had hung out a proclamation calling for recruits.

"The French railways are run down. They need more or less rehabilitation. France has no men who can be spared from the front. Before we can train men to go into the trenches we can supply France's railroad wants, and we can do it almost immediately. Any men we send over must be soldiers, so it will be necessary for the railroad forces to enter the army."

So read the circular, containing excerpts from a War Department order. It was explained that five construction regiments of six companies each were to be America's first engineering offerings to France, to be followed later by regiments of engineers for railway operating purposes. Men regularly employed in railroading pursuits were to be accepted as recruits upon the presentation of the proper credentials.

Many railroad men, representing both the Upland Valley and the C. & W., were grouped about the flaming placards as Chick Wharton and Bob Grier made their way through the crowd in quest of their old friend, Uncle Jim Bennett—soon to be Captain James Bennett, if you please. Soon they found him, just finishing up with the acceptance of a rugged Irish track foreman.

Uncle Jim smiled broadly as the boys hove in sight—and that smile meant plainly, that Uncle Jim had already been interviewed that morning by a certain railroad official of fairly high rank.

“Sign here, boys,” he suggested blandly, pushing a blank and a fountain pen at them.

It was all over in a few minutes. A regular army sergeant put them through the physical examination and other details. When the 9.45 Day Limited rolled in Mr. Charles Wharton and Mr. Robert Grier, Jr., erstwhile Brighton students, were bonafide soldiers of Uncle Sam, members of the Third Regiment of Engineers!

The next week passed rapidly. Like recruits sent to an army cantonment the railroad engineers were put through the infantry manual of arms with rifles and sidearms. They had bayonet drills and sidearms drills and all the courses of instruction that would fit them for military service. It was explained that the War Department had decided upon this in order that every American would be qualified to take care of himself under all circumstances.

“Looks like we might get into some real fighting some time over there,” remarked

Wharton one afternoon after two hours of "hep—hep—hep—hep—hep" on the drill ground back of the C. & W. car repair shop.

"Golly, I hope so," said "Rabbit" Grier.

That France needed these railroad boys and needed them speedily was demonstrated in a hurry-up order for the departure of the C. & W. company. The call came on the day the two Brighton boys ordinarily would have been returning to school after a brief vacation. Entraining that night the Chesterton contingent was rushed to New York, and the next afternoon stood on the dock at Hoboken ready to take transport for France.

"The End of a Perfect Day," Wharton was whistling. The company was standing "at rest" and for the first time the two Chesterton lads were gazing upon the outlines of a massive ocean liner on which the railroad contingents would embark.

What a difference in the neatly uniformed railroad men now ranged along the dock. Once greasy overalls and grimy caps, the men now stood erect and smart-looking in the khaki of the U. S. Army, the buttons on their tunics bearing the device of the Engineer's, the familiar castles upon their collars.

"Over there's 'Buster' Raleigh—and there's 'Headlight' Harry Kavanaugh—and, gee whiz, there's our old friend Gus Davenport who ran the steam shovel when they built the spur over at Carrolltown last summer," chanted Bob.

Chick was taking them all in. "Who is the chap standing next to Gus Davenport?" asked Wharton. "I bumped into him getting off the train at noon and he avoided me. His face seems familiar."

Bob scrutinized the face under the turned down rim of the army hat. In a moment he turned to his chum.

"Gee, I got him now. Remember the fellow that dad had on the carpet that night the Upland Valley fast freight was wrecked? That fellow who was a brakeman on the night shifter other end of the yard?"

"You mean Schmidt—Al Schmidt?" countered Wharton.

"Sure as guns—the identical chap," answered Bob. "Do you suppose—"

At that moment came the sharp command: "Tenshun."

Soon the engineers were piling aboard ship—bound for the seat of war "over there."

CHAPTER VI

OFF FOR FRANCE

GENERAL BYNG has smashed through the German line at Cambrai!" was the glad cry that reechoed through the camp of the American engineers one December morning within a week after the arrival of the pioneers from the United States in their English camp on the outskirts of Manchester.

Eager faces peered out of tent flaps as a lanky Yank who had been a fireboy on the Rio Grande back in the U. S. A. flashed merrily down the company street along which the Chesterton & Western contingent was camped, yelling the news at the top of his voice. Strident voices called after him for further details of the report. Reveille had just sounded and the American railroaders were "slicking up" for assembly call.

"I say, Yank," chimed a husky shop mechanic, adopting the cockney accents of a Londener, "I say Yank," he inquired of a brother Yank who had his nose thrust out

of a neighboring tent in the crisp December air, "what's all the eloquence about?"

It sounded good—that report from the battlefront over there in France—and every Yank was intent upon getting the particulars. Soon the street was alive with bubbling youths, some just getting into their overcoats, others stooping to make a recalcitrant shoelace "stay put." Of one accord they headed for the canteen at the end of the street.

There the Rio Grander had the center of the stage and was spreading the good news. Yes, it was quite true: the British Army under General Byng had made a crashing drive against the Hindenburg line, and the Germans had been forced back over a wide sector.

"Byng, did you say?" queried one westerner. And then:—"Biff, Byng, bang," he counted off, with three short, stiff uppercuts in the ribs of a dancing "buddie."

"Now we'll have a real 'Byngen-on-the-Rhine,'" essayed a poetic lad who had wrestled with Appleton's reader before he had deserted school books to take up railroad timetables.

The tidings from France were sweet news to the boys from America who had just come

more than three thousand miles on their way to help save France in the great struggle for her freedom. Rushed from their homes in the States to "Merrie England" on quick-sailing transports, they now were in active training and awaiting call to the front. The news of General Byng's advance, coming just at the time of the Americans' arrival in England on their way to the front, seemed a harbinger of ill omen for German arms.

Privates Charles Wharton and Robert Grier—once Brighton students but now soldiers under the American flag—were right in their element. The voyage across the Atlantic, the arrival in England, the splendid reception accorded them by the English and the life here in camp at Manchester, with the likelihood of early service in France, were quite to their liking.

"Almost like home here in England," Chick had remarked the day of their arrival, after they had disembarked the transport and had been whirled away to their Manchester camp in an English train through towns that turned out to give them a hearty "glad hand."

"You bet," Bob had replied. "All Anglo-Saxons in one big family after all."

Captain James Bennett, erstwhile Uncle Jim Bennett, yard foreman at Chesterton, had said to the boys only the previous evening there was likely to be good news from France any moment; and, furthermore, he would not be surprised should the engineers get a hurry-up call to France any time now.

"They need 'em bad over there in Flanders to keep things moving up to the battle lines," he had remarked, adding that an Allied offensive, should it be launched, would require the services of all available engineering forces to keep pace with the advancing armies.

That Uncle Jim either was a first class prophet or had "inside information" on military developments was evidenced before the day was many hours old. Hardly had the excitement over announcement of General Byng's advance subsided before the clarion call to service came like a bolt out of the blue sky. Noon mess had been concluded, and the men of the Third Regiment were enjoying a few moments' leisure, when suddenly the call to quarters was sounded. At 1:30 came the order to break camp, and within two hours the regiment was on the move—where, no one, except her officers, knew.

By nightfall it was all too evident. In the gloaming the train bearing Company A, Third Regiment—the Chesterton crowd—slipped into an English seaport and came to a stop on a siding well toward the sea-front with the outlines of harbor shipping silhouetted against the dim bleak gray of the December night line. As Bob Grier and Chick Wharton were slipping their packs over their shoulders and getting ready to detrain their old friend Uncle Jim slipped alongside. Uncle Jim had promised Superintendent Grier back there in Chesterton to look after the Brighton boys and he was fulfilling his trust.

“Know where you’re going?” he asked with a whimsical smile.

“I can almost guess,” answered Bob with a grin.

“No need to tell you,” captain Bennett confided. “You fellows have it doped out right.”

After a moment he added:

“On our way right to the front, and we’ll be up there with the Tommies before you can say Jack Robinson.”

Mess that night was an emergency ration from the pack on each engineer-soldier’s

back, and it had no sooner been concluded than the order to move aboard ship was given. Before midnight the channel steamer *Sussex* had weighed anchor and was moving out into the North Sea under the escort of ever vigilant British destroyers. Before daylight the American troops had disembarked upon the soil of France, having accomplished the voyage without mishap under the chaperonage of the British bulldogs of the High Seas Fleet.

In all happened so quick—one night in an English camp, the next night in France on a troop train bound for the battle line where the British artillery, the tanks and the troops of General Byng were pounding relentlessly against the German lines in the Cambrai sector.

“Where do we go from here boys?” the Yankee engineers were singing as their train got under way in the French port and pulled out in the open country. It was early daylight and the boys were eager for a glimpse at the country they had heard so much about—brave, indomitable France. Despite the long trip there was little sleep among the sturdy looking crowd from Chesterton, although an occasional chap

who had learned how to rest even among the din of a roundhouse was "taking a few winks."

Bob and his chum were hanging out the window of their compartment in the French passenger coach. They had been quick to note the difference between the rolling stock of the French railways and that of their own equipment at home. The French cars, with their compartments opening out of the sides of the coaches, seemed so strange; and the cars seemed so much smaller than the giant steel Pullmans they were accustomed to back in Chesterton. But what struck them more oddly was the French style of locomotive, much smaller in size, the engine crew exposed to the elements on what seemed an open platform, instead of the "chummy" cab of an American locomotive, with comfortable seats for engineer and fireman.

As the train flitted jerkily along the two boys grew reminiscent over home.

"Wonder what the folks at home would say if they knew we were getting into it so soon?" remarked Chick.

Bob chuckled.

"On the level chum," he grunted, "when I think of some of those fellows who have

been putting in weeks and weeks of it in camp, pining to get going, I'm tickled to death to think we got into the railroad service, with the chance to get into action so soon."

"Same here," smiled Wharton. "I'm ready for anything now, and the sooner it comes the better, so far as yours truly is concerned."

Brighton seemed far away now way over there across the water.

"I'd give a farm just to peek in there a minute now and give the laugh to those fellows who are cramming for fall term exams," snorted Chick with a prolonged guffaw.

"Yes, and so far as football is concerned," added ex-gridiron captain Rabbit Grier, "here's a chance to make a touchdown every minute."

Wharton eyed his chum seriously for a moment.

"Better watch those Huns for foul tackles," was his comment, as he sensed impending contact with the enemy.

"Let 'em come," snapped Bob. "I'm ready with a stiff straight arm and a burst of speed for that goal line over there along the Rhine."

The monotony of a long railroad trip on a slow French troop train that was doing its level best to deliver the Yankee engineers at the front as quickly as possible despite its well-worn equipment was punctuated all too soon by an ominous "boom-boom" that could be heard even above the rattle of the train and the grinding of the wheel flanges on the rails.

"What's that?" exclaimed Bob, as a rumble like that of distant thunder was borne to their ears.

A thunder storm in December—impossible!

"For the love of Mike, man; that's the crashing of the big guns—sure as you are born," declared Chick.

And so it proved—the Brighton boys' first taste of warfare.

By now their train was moving well up into the heart of the advanced military operations. Village after village, plainly showing the ravages of the Hun guns that had been turned against them in the German advance on Paris in 1914, had been passed for several hours. Now the scene changed to huge ammunition dumps and mammoth warehouses and long motor trains wending their way toward the front.

"Pretty near there," confided Captain Bennett as he sauntered into the boys' compartment.

The lads from Chesterton proceeded to ply their old friend from Chesterton with all manner of questions.

"Do you think we will soon be into it?" asked Bob.

"Haven't a doubt they need us at once," answered the old yard foreman.

"What will we do for the present?" interrogated Chick.

"From what I can learn we will be thrown right in with all the available engineering forces projecting new railroad lines over the conquered territory," explained their Captain. "General Byng's forces have enjoyed unusual success in driving back the Germans. In order to keep the Hun on the run the British must have railroads to carry forward supplies. It's up to us to help 'em out."

The lads were eager for service.

"That probably means laying ties, putting down rails, driving spikes and all that sort of thing, doesn't it?" pondered Bob.

"Right you are," replied the Captain.

"I never had much experience, but believe me I'm there when it comes to putting Mr.

Byng over that Hun line," chanted Chick in high glee.

And that's exactly what the Chesterton boys were doing in short order. Hardly had they arrived at the designated point well up behind the battle lines, detrained and grabbed a quick ration, when they were ordered out on the firing line to the support of English engineers who were doing their level best to build the necessary facilities for keeping the troops in their new-won positions.

Shovels, oak and chestnut ties cut out of the forest lands of France by Uncle Sam's forestry engineers, steel rails, fish-plates to bind them together, engineering supplies of all kinds had been placed aboard a special French train prepared in anticipation of the arrival of the new reinforcements.

"Break ranks—all aboard!" was Captain Bennett's orders as the column of Chesterton engineers drew up in front of their waiting train. Away they went, and in a moment were threading their way into the very heart of the battlefield just to the northeast of a little French village that the boys learned later was the town of Gouzeaucourt.

CHAPTER VII

STRANDED IN NO MAN'S LAND

GET right in there, boys, and show them how Yankee boys can build a railroad right through to Berlin!" shouted a commanding figure in khaki who came striding forward as the construction train bearing Company A, Third Regiment, U. S. Railway Engineers, came to a long sliding stop.

He was Colonel Reynolds, the leader of the Third, who had preceded his boys to the front and was acting in co-operation with English officers in planning the work at hand. Captain Jim Bennett saluted and was in earnest conversation with his superior officer.

Bob and Chick found themselves in a few minutes armed with pick and shovel hard at it. Their company was broken up in platoons and set to work building roughly railway tracks that were being laid down over No Man's Land. The Germans in their retreat had endeavored to tear up their railroads as they fell back. In greater part they had

succeeded, although in some places whole sections of track were found. These were being spliced together with new sections of track. It was rough work, too, for the battlefield was shell-pocked with great holes made by high explosives; and, furthermore, the giant tanks that had made possible the remarkable advance of Byng's troops had waddled all over the field leaving confusion in their wake.

Occasionally an enemy shell came hurtling through the air. The company platoons were distributed all over the field of action in working parties. Bob and Chick were working together under the direction of Corporal Joe Smalley, who had been an engineer on the Upland Valley back home. Like typical Yankees the Chesterton engineers were bending their best efforts to bring order out of chaos and aid the advance.

"Under fire sure enough, chum," ventured Chick as he and Bob plied their shovels in excavation for the placement of a tie.

"Yes, and they're coming pretty close," answered Bob as he turned to note the effect of a shrapnel shell that burst several hundred yards in advance of their position, tearing a great hole in the ground and scattering earth in every direction.

"You should worry," countered Chick. "A little rabbit like you can squat right down and give 'em the merry ha-ha every time, whereas a tall guy like yours truly is meat for an eagle-eyed gunner."

"Hindenburg don't draw the line on the little fellows, however," countered Bob, with a knowing expression. "He knows Yanks are all the same—short or tall."

Talking while they worked, the two chums were startled by a cry from Corporal Smalley.

"Look out!" he cried, and dropped flat on the ground face down.

Quick as a flash the boys followed suit. Their ears caught the low whining approach of a shell. Looking up for an instant Chick beheld it bearing down directly upon them.

"Coming right at us," he cried to his chum.

Breathlessly the boys awaited the terrific explosion that seemed inevitable. But it never came! The shell fell harmlessly in front of the shell hole into which they had dropped, and lay quiet and unshattered.

"Made out of limburger cheese—a 'dud'," laughed Smalley as he scrambled to his feet. The boys followed suit and for a moment paused to examine the unexploded shell.

"If that had exploded—whew!" whistled Chick.

"Yes, and if Kaiser Bill hadn't been a blankety-blank fool and set out to conquer the world he wouldn't be in for such a good licking," countered Corporal Smalley. "Come on, boys, lets build this railroad to Berlin," he urged.

Despite the sporadic artillery fire the engineers continued their work steadily. Half an hour more the firing abated as though the German guns had been entirely withdrawn from that sector. Working like beavers the new arrivals advanced foot by foot all during the afternoon over No Man's Land. By nightfall they had made considerable progress.

The order was given to camp all night on the battlefield in order to be ready for an early start in the morning. To the great joy of the tired young engineers their evening mess was made enjoyable by the addition of steaming hot soup brought up by mess couriers from the village of Gouzcaucourt where Salvation Army lassies had established emergency canteens. Under the stars and with only their blankets for a bed the boys of Company A set about making themselves as comfortable as possible under the circumstances.

"How are you, boys?" came a cheery voice out of the gloom as Captain Bennett edged into the shell-crater where Bob and Chick were curling up for the first night's rest on the battlefield.

"Couldn't be better," answered Bob cheerily.

"All I need to make me happy is the old guitar I left back there in Brighton dormitories," was Chick's rejoinder as he stretched his six feet of manhood to the embrace of Mother Earth.

Before passing along Captain Bennett informed his two proteges that five regiments of Chinese coolies—recruited in the Orient for labor—were on their way up to the front and were expected on the morrow.

There were no "Taps" out there on No Man's Land to tell the enemy of the proximity of the American engineers—and none would have been heard, had they been sounded, for every mother's son found sleep in a shell crater easy after the toil of the day.

Before daybreak the engineers again were relentlessly at it. Pick and shovel, sledge-hammer and tie-rivet—all were relentlessly wielded by the Yankees as they forged the steel and wooden framework on which the

Allied rolling stock could bring forward guns and munitions with which to fortify the advanced positions.

Suddenly, a few minutes past five o'clock, without warning, the skies let loose a perfect inferno. From the direction of the German lines came a holocaust of steel that swept over the advanced Anglo-American lines with the fury of a tempest. It seemed a thousand guns were in action—touched off simultaneously in a concert of gigantic ordnance.

"Holy smoke, chum, the Hun is at it early to-day," exclaimed Chick as he and Bob dropped a huge tie into position.

"And tuning up on all eight cylinders," added his old Brighton roommate.

By all signs the Germans were laying down a heavy artillery fire that boded some new line of action.

For ten minutes the intense bombardment continued overhead. The long-range fire cleared the position held by the engineers, the fire being directed miles toward the rear.

In a few minutes Captain Bennett came dashing along the terrain from the direction of the dugout several hundred yards westward where Colonel Reynolds had his headquarters in an abandoned trench. For a moment he

engaged his two lieutenants in conversation and continued along the line to other working parties. The lieutenants in turn called their sergeants and corporals.

Five minutes more and Corporal Smalley summoned his working party of ten men about him.

"The Hun has laid down a heavy barrage across the advanced portion of our lines," he told them. "We are completely cut off from the main body of our forces! Get ready to retire!"

Hastily the men began collecting their tools.

"What's up, do you suppose?" asked Chick of his chum.

"Plain as day," answered Bob. "That barrage is a protection for the Huns. They're coming forward to attack us and will be here most any minute."

"I'm ready," soliloquized Chick as he laid his right hand caressingly along the holster that held his trusty automatic.

The corporal soon let them know the plan of action. In the face of the German counter-attack Colonel Reynolds had been authorized to order a withdrawal.

"We are to fall back on our construction train and take chances on getting back

through the barrage to the protection of our own guns," said Smalley.

Reluctantly the engineers started to evacuate their position.

"Gee, I hate to back off from those square-head Prussians," muttered Chick, turning toward the German lines with a sneer of disgust.

"Here, too," grumbled Bob scornfully.

The men of Company A were converging on a depression in the terrain where the construction train awaited them under the shelter of a sloping knoll. As they drew nearer they were cognizant of some disturbance among the first arrivals. Excited voices were raised in a tumult and figures in khaki were scurrying along the flat cars toward the front end of the train.

"A nice mess," the Brighton boys heard Lieutenant Overman exclaim disgustedly.

In a few minutes the cause of the commotion was learned.

"Who do you suppose pulled that trick?" Corporal Smalley was asking.

"What's the matter now?" asked Bob.

"Matter? Our locomotive's gone—took wings and flitted away in the dawn," answered the non-com.

Imagine the consternation of Captain Bennett who, when he ordered his men aboard the construction train, found the engine completely vanished!

To all intents, some one had crawled into the cab, pulled the throttle open and sent the little French locomotive scurrying back toward the Allied lines, leaving the engineers stranded in No Man's Land, with a deadly barrage overhead and the Germans coming over the top.

Captain Bennett's voice sounded over the tumult. He had jumped to a flat car and called for attention.

"Who was mounting guard over this train?" he thundered.

Lieutenant Overman answered him.

"Private Schmidt, sir."

"Where is Private Schmidt?"

"Here, sir," And he stepped forward.

In reply to questions Schmidt avowed he had come to the rear of the train on his patrol, and that upon going forward again he had been surprised to find the locomotive suddenly gone. He had not heard it moving away on account of the barrage.

Bob nudged Chick with an apprehensive look.

"Remember Schmidt?" he queried, pointing a finger at the sentry.

"Remember him? I should say I do," answered Wharton. "The fellow whom they questioned back there in Chesterton about the wreck of No. 87."

For a moment the boys eyed each other dubiously.

"Think that fellow's a spy," ventured Chick.

"I—I've got my suspicions," muttered Bob.

There was no time now to probe the disappearance of the locomotive. The thing to do was to fall back with the handful of engineers who might at any moment be fighting for their lives against a horde of Huns.

On the double-quick Company A was ordered to the rear. Taking the line of the railway track the Chesterton engineers fell back steadily. But soon a new peril overtook them.

Gas!

The wind was blowing steadily in the faces of the retreating Americans. With it came the deadly fumes from gas-shells being exploded directly in front of them from the deadly barrage traveling overhead. Tears,

sneezes and coughing. To make matters worse there were no gasmasks. They had been left behind on the abandoned train in the precipitate haste of the retreat.

Trailing along over the terrain, steadily, approaching the margin of the barrage, choked by the gas and tear-shells, the plucky engineers ran suddenly into an abandoned line of trenches. The yawning ditch opened under their feet as a welcome haven of refuge.

"Into that trench boys and scatter for the dugouts," yelled Captain Bennett.

CHAPTER VIII

DOWN IN THE DUGOUT

WITH one flying leap Bob and Chick lowered away into the abandoned German trench. Corporal Smalley was right on their backs and calling the men of his platoon together.

"Quick, men; deploy to the right there and grab off the first dugout you find," yelled Smalley.

The gas as yet had not penetrated the trench to any considerable degree, the wind sweeping it along No Man's Land at a lively pace. As a precaution Smalley ordered his men to tie handkerchiefs or guaze from their first aid kits across their faces. Occasionally a whiff of the mustard gas was wafted into the trench and immediately stirred up a fit of coughing.

"Must be a dugout close here," mused Smalley as he led the way along the zigzag passageway.

Turning abruptly into a runway that led away at an angle of some forty-five degrees

from the direction they had been running the platoon of engineers came presently to the face of an old dugout. It was partially caved in and a fall of earth had partially obstructed the entrance.

"Good enough!" cried Smalley. "Some one of Byng's shells must have smashed in here in that big advance a few days ago over this section."

"I only hope it bashed in a bunch of Huns while it was landing," commented Bob as he followed the non-com.

Thrusting his feet into the aperture the corporal lowered away. Bob was right on his heels and Chick following hard by. The remainder of the platoon dived in one at a time.

Smalley took only a step or two after landing inside the dugout before he pitched headlong over some obstacle on the floor and sprawled full length in the darkness. Bob had been so close he could almost touch the non-com and instantly divined his leader had gone down.

"What's up, Joe?" he called, at the same time drawing his automatic and sweeping the dark area immediately in front.

"I'm all right; just fell over something," came the answer.

Bob put back the revolver and drew forth the tiny flash light that his father had given him among several farewell remembrances just before leaving Chesterton. At his touch the light leaped forth and spread its glow over the abandoned dugout.

A gruesome sight confronted the party of American engineers!

Directly in front of Bob lay the bodies of a Scotch Highlander in kilts and a stalwart Hun of the Prussian Guards. The hilt of the Scotchman's bayonet was buried in the body of the German. In the right hand of the latter, the fingers still stiffly clenching it, was a revolver. The two of them lay in a heap just as they had fallen in a terrific death grapple. Corporal Smalley had fallen over their prostrate forms.

Lying close up to the two duelists were the forms of three other Huns who, to all intents, had fallen in the last fierce fight with the Scotchman.

"Well, what do you think of that?" was all that the American corporal could gasp.

Bob stood transfixed with the rays of his searchlight playing on the face of the fallen Scotchman. It was his first contact with the grim reality of war. Just the trace of a

smile showed on the face of the Highlander—a smile of satisfaction that he had “made good” ere death overtook him.

As Bob looked on, and the true import of the dramatic scene unfolded before him was borne into his inner consciousness, his left hand strayed to his head, and off came his cap.

“My hat is off to this brave kiltie,” he faltered, with a trace of emotion in his voice.

Instantly every cap in the party of seven came off.

“Easy to see what happened here,” volunteered corporal Smalley. “When that big wave of General Byng’s army swept over, this laddie from the Highlands put in here to mop up any leftover Huns. He was surprised by a party of four Germans who had taken refuge here when their regiment fell back. Four against one in the dark, but, look what this brave kiltie did!”

In his excitement the corporal snatched the flash light from Bob and dropped its circle of light on the fallen Germans one after the other. Each had fallen of bayonet wounds. One had been pierced through the neck. Two others had been fatally wounded but in such a way that they might have

lived for a time. But the foe with whom the Scotchman had clenched in the last fight had been run through the heart just as he had shot home the bullet that had brought down the lone Scotchman.

"These are our allies—chaps that fight like this Scotchman," declared Smalley in an exalted tone.

For a moment the little group of Americans stood stolidly contemplating the death scene and reflecting on the valor of the lone Scotchman in the underground chamber of death.

"For this I'll make some Huns pay dearly before I get through," ejaculated Chick heatedly.

"I for another will help avenge this brave lad's death," added Bob, addressing the fallen hero.

The scene quite distracted the attention of the engineers who, unmindful of the battle raging above them, quite forgot their own predicament. Deep down in the earth they were quite safe for the time being from the gas sweeping the battlefield.

Presently, however, the affair of the moment came back to them and they began to think of their comrades and what next to do.

"I guess our plan is to stay here for a while

awaiting developments," said corporal Smalley as he drew near the mouth of the dugout. Thrusting his head through the opening he scanned the trench in either direction. At a distance of less than a hundred feet he beheld two other men of Company A stumbling along the passageway.

"This way, fellows, to safety," he called out.

In a moment two privates, one of whom was nearly overcome by the gas fumes, flung themselves into the dugout. Immediately all hands were busy ministering aid to their hard breathing comrade. The air in the tunnel was stale and fetid but infinitely better than the open area of the gas-swept battlefield.

"We'll wait here awhile until this blows over and then make our way back to the British line," announced corporal Smalley after raising himself from the dugout for a moment and inspecting the terrain in front of the trench.

It was a dismal spot, what with the fallen dead and half the living still suffering the effects of the mustard gas. The party crouched in silence, save for an occasional gasp from one of the gas-sufferers.

"Suppose we give this heroic Scotchman a decent burial," suggested Corporal Smalley. "Its the least we can do for the poor brave fellow."

"Right," chorused the members of the stranded platoon.

It was first decided to explore the dugout. There were several other flashlights in the party and the subterranean chamber was revealed in its every detail. Investigation showed the Germans had fitted it up as comfortably as possible for trench life during their occupancy of it. Berths had been hollowed out of the earth into which the Huns had laid themselves away for sleep like so many mummies in an Egyptian crypt. In one corner stood a crude fireplace of stone and brick with a delapidated piece of stove pipe running up to the ground level above. Empty bottles and tin cans that had contained food strewed the place. To one side stood a "home-made" table and on it a checkerboard and checkers. Several candles were found. These were lit and in turn cast their flickering shadows over the interior of the weird cavern.

"Take those bayonets, fellows, and go to it," ordered the corporal.

After a bit, with persistent effort, a grave had been hollowed out of the dugout floor. When all was finished the body of the Highlander was tenderly lifted into its last resting place in the old dugout quite removed from the roar and carnage of the battlefield.

"He'll sleep quietly there probably never to be disturbed again," intoned Smalley reverently.

"May he rest in peace," added Bob solemnly, as the last clods of earth were being deposited on the new-made grave.

Waiting half an hour Corporal Smalley made another reconnaissance in the trench outside and came back presently to announce that the gas had lifted and that so far as he could determine the barrage had died out altogether. It was with some relief that the little platoon made good its escape from the dugout of death and breathed again the free pure air of the open country.

"Probably best to follow out orders and keep on retiring," said the corporal to his party.

"But, wait a minute—" he added and forthwith climbed up a rickety old ladder that led out of the trench.

For a moment he surveyed the terrain in either direction.

"Come on, fellows," he called, with a sweep of his left hand. "Our boys of Company A are up out of the trenches and still falling back toward our own lines. Guess we'll follow suit."

Bob and Chick climbed up and joined their corporal. To their left and right they beheld straggling parties of Americans making their way toward the British line. The barrage had entirely lifted.

"What do you suppose has happened?" queried Chick, surveying the field of action.

"Don't know, chum," answered Bob. "No Germans in sight. Either they didn't come over the top under protection of that barrage, or else they postponed their attack for some reason or other."

"Maybe the British guns spotted them and put them out of commission," suggested Chick, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the German guns.

"Maybe so," agreed his chum.

For some time the party of engineers wended their way forward. At some distance on either side other working parties were moving along toward the English lines they had left the previous day when the engineering details had been sent out on their hazardous work under fire.

Presently the quiet of the retreat was stirred by the rattle of machine-gun fire directly in front. As though by magic other machine guns broke into action all along the line. At the same time came warning cries from other American parties on either side of Corporal Smalley and his platoon.

"Down, fellows," yelled Smalley, throwing himself flat upon the ground.

Now the firing along the line became general.

"I'm hit," cried Smalley, resting his left elbow on the earth and exhibiting a limp hand from which the blood flowed. Bob who was next him edged over close and, without thought of danger, began aiding his comrade adjust a first-aid dressing from his kit.

Without warning, and in a seemingly inexplicable manner, an enemy force had loomed up suddenly between the American engineers and their own lines.

"Great guns, man, do you know what's happened?" exclaimed Smalley as he grit his teeth to conceal pain from the wounded hand. "Germans came over the top and swept right over us while we were there in that dugout burying the Scotchman. They've



"Where Do We Go From Here, Boys?" HUMMED CHUCK

advanced and occupied a trench directly in front of us. All our boys of Company A have probably been cut off out here in No Man's Land. Either we cut our way through that German line or stay here and take our chance on being rescued in an English counter-attack."

The German fire had redoubled along the entire line. Shifting for themselves the Americans had dropped in their tracks and wormed their way into shell-holes where they lay concealed from the deadly hail of the Hun machine guns.

Corporal Smalley, Bob and Chick were together in the hollow of a crater that had been hollowed out by the explosion of a high explosive. The thin ice covering the mud and water broke under their weight and they floundered in an ugly cold coze that chilled them to the bone; but it was temporary safety, and a coign of vantage from which to direct a new plan of action.

"Where do we go from here, boys?" hummed Chick, as he rested his revolver on the frozen parapet of the dugout ready to repel a rushing attack.

CHAPTER IX

THROUGH THE GERMAN LINE

IF they see us out here and come over after us we'll have to stand our ground and fight it out—that's all we can do," was the corporal's comment as he raised his head over the ledge of the shell crater and surveyed the terrain.

Bob and Chick were looking to their firearms and making ready for any surprise attack.

"Only hope I can give as good account of myself as that gallant Scotch laddie we just left back there in his dugout grave," said Bob after a moment, gritting his teeth.

The two Brighton boys and their corporal seemed in a hopeless predicament. It was only too apparent that one or more waves of German infantrymen had gone over them while they were in the dugout and now were occupying a line of trenches several hundred yards westward.

While the boys were deliberating on what next to do the hum of an airplane was heard

just to the rear. Smalley, spotting it first, turned to behold a giant Gotha bombing plane skimming close to the surface over the battlefield. Even as he looked a machine gun in the pit of the Gotha spat a rain of fire at some object on the ground.

"Great Scott, fellows; here's a Hun right on top of us," cried the corporal.

Bob and his chum spied it at the same moment and in a flash pulled their revolvers.

"Don't shoot," cautioned Smalley. "Stretch out quick there as though you were dead. We may be able to fool those two chaps circling up there. Take a chance, or that machine gun may get us all."

Suiting action to his words the corporal toppled backward over the edge of the shell hole, falling face upward and with arms outstretched in a careless posture. Bob and Chick followed the lead of their corporal and huddled together as though they had fallen in battle together.

The airplane came up fast and skimmed along directly over the crater where the three Americans lay simulating death. The machine was so close that the pilot could gaze directly down upon the trio of engineers. But what he saw seemed to satisfy him

that the foemen beneath him were out of action. For a precious moment the machine gun pointed ominously at the three helpless Yankees. Then the plane winged onward in search of fugitive figures who might be moving over the battlefield.

"The dirty dogs," hissed Smalley. "Shooting down helpless men who haven't a chance in an equal combat."

"That's the German style of warfare," put in Bob with sarcasm.

"But we fooled them that time with a bit of camouflage," chuckled Smalley.

Chick Wharton, who had smashed many a stalwart line in football at Brighton but always played clean, was fairly writhing with indignation.

"Come on down here on the ground, you square-head brutes," he called after the disappearing airmen, "and I'll fight you both with my hands tied behind my back. You yellow curs!"

For a time the engineers watched the airman hovering over the battlefield, flitting here and there, fitfully raining bombs and machine-gun fire at stranded Americans—a giant vulture seeking its prey. After a time it disappeared from view in the haze of the late December afternoon.

Until nightfall the three Americans crouched in the shell crater unable to rise for fear of attracting the fire of German sharp-shooters in the trench directly ahead. Then the darkness settled down over No Man's Land and they began conniving together some plan of action.

"No doubt another German wave has come into that trench we left back there early in the afternoon," argued Smalley, "and in that event we have Germans in front and in back of us."

"Yes, and the chances are they will advance during the night into the frontline trench to consolidate the position," added Bob.

"Which means they will come our way before long," joined in Chick, who had taken off a heavy mud and ice-caked shoe and was rubbing a half frozen foot.

"I'm in favor of getting out of here; what do you fellows say?" queried Smalley bravely.

"With you all the way," was Bob's rejoinder, to which Chick readily added his assent.

Thereupon the three engineers of Company A resolved upon a movement forward directly toward their own lines and over the front line German trench. Smalley's hand wound was giving him some pain,

but the arm was still active and he declared the injury trifling.

"Here's what we do," the corporal began. "Worm our way right out over No Man's Land directly for that trench. Keep close enough together so we can reach each other. Every few minutes reach out and touch hands. Make absolutely no noise. When we get to the German trench we will rise and make a bolt for it together. We may clear the trench and escape in the darkness. If not all of us then some of us——"

"At any rate, we'll make a game try of it," affirmed Bob tightening his belt and adjusting his revolver.

Chick was impatient for the start. Quietly the trio divested themselves of anything that would make a noise or impede their progress while crawling. At a signal from Smalley they squirmed out of the shell hole and set their course westward across No Man's Land.

It was slow progress for the tired youths, but they crept steadily ahead Indian fashion. After a time as the darkness turned to ink black they became bolder. Following the lead of Smalley they got up on hands and knees and in this fashion moved forward more rapidly.

"Watch for flares," whispered Smalley, who was at the left of the line.

Hardly had he spoken before a rocket burst in the air close ahead of them and spread its saffron glare over the open field. Instantly the three engineers flattened out on the ground and lay motionless while the pyrotechnic piece burned itself out. It was essential now to be carefully on the alert, for the Germans, figuring there were stray opponents who might be moving over the terrain, sent up flares every few minutes. In these intervals the Americans hugged the ground and prayed they might escape detection.

Slowly, foot by foot, they edged their way forward until presently they were close enough to hear voices in the trench, the deep guttural of German voices. When next they joined hands according to the pre-arranged plan Smalley clutched Bob's hand with a grip that meant "Come closer." Bob passed the signal on to his chum and the three drew stealthily together until their heads were close.

"Lie quiet for a while until the Huns stop talking," whispered the non-com. "Then when I signal we will all three move forward together."

The night by now was bitter cold and the engineers in turn were feeling the effects of inaction. While in motion wriggling over the frozen earth the exercise kept them warm; but now they were numbed by the low temperature and the prolonged exposure of the hazardous journey.

An hour passed thus, and then silence reigned in the trench ahead. Smalley's fingers clutched Bob who in turn warned Chick, and then the trio moved forward again like redmen on the trail. For five minutes they squirmed along until eventually the outline of the trench loomed ahead of them. The critical moment had arrived.

In unison they moved forward until only an arm's length separated them over the line of the trench. At a given signal the corporal slid forward like an agile panther leaving the two Brighton boys alone. From their position Bob and Chick could see Smalley project his head over the trench. Gazing back and forth for a moment the non-com surveyed the interior of the trench and then edged back alongside the boys. He signaled them to come close.

"Half a dozen Germans lounging on the fire-step in there apparently asleep," he

whispered. "A lone sentry standing guard at the upper end. I'll go forward first and you fellows jump up and leap the trench when you see I'm in position. I'll cover the sentry until you fellows get across, and then I'll follow. Once on the other side cut loose for all you're worth and keep right on going. Understand?"

Bob and Chick understood and were ready for the break.

"Here's good luck," whispered Smalley, and the three clasped hands in farewell. Well they knew their break for liberty would in all likelihood stir the sleeping German infantrymen and call down rifle fire. But it was a case of life and death—that or capture on the morrow when the advancing Huns would come upon them.

The lithe little corporal was quickly to his post with his automatic ready for instant use. As the non-com drew up again to the trench he covered the sentry and waited for his confederates to make the break.

In another moment Bob and Chick had struggled to their feet and were running pell-mell for the trench. Chick was first to make the daring leap in the darkness. As he came down on the far side of the trench

his right foot struck a frozen clump of earth and he pitched forward on the frozen ground. Bob, close behind him, came down with better luck but made such a noise as his numb feet struck the sloping parapet of the trench that the sentry was attracted and wheeled to find out the cause of the disturbance.

He raised his rifle to fire, but before he could bring the weapon into position the crack of Smalley's revolver split the silence of the night and the German dropped in his tracks with a bullet in his brain. And in the darkness a third figure made the flying leap across the chasm in the wake of the first two who had scrambled to their feet and set off across No Man's Land as fast as their legs could carry them. No barbed wire intervened, for the Germans had but too lately occupied the trench. Immediately the trench was in a furore. The sleeping Hun infantrymen, aroused by the shot, and noting the fallen sentry, leaped to their feet and seized their rifles. All was confusion. Several of them shook the dying sentry endeavoring to learn what had happened. Others leaped to the firing step and let loose a sporadic fire, supposing an Allied attack was upon them. Officers and more men

leaped from dugouts and ran along the trench preparing their men for the expected attack. But it never materialized.

Running as they had never run on the gridiron in a football game at Brighton, Bob and Chick drew steadily away from the trench. The rifle fire continued and they could hear the hum of the bullets streaming about them in the darkness. Leaping the trench so closely together they had been able to join up when once across and ran now together in the general direction that they knew meant safety. After five minutes steady progress they dropped to the ground in the darkness and listened for their corporal.

For a few minutes the pair crouched in the darkness hoping against hope their corporal had made good his escape. The only sound that smote their ears was the fire of the aroused German trench.

"We'll have to move, chum, for they may have sent a raiding party after us," suggested Chick.

"Guess we will, but I hate like the very mischief to keep on without knowing what has become of Smalley," replied Bob.

Reluctantly the two Brighton chums scrambled to their feet and set off in the quest of shelter within their own lines.

CHAPTER X

THE ESCAPE AT CAMBRAI

THREE hours later an English military police standing guard at a cross-roads close up to the Allied line in front of the village of Gouzeaucourt was startled to see two forlorn figures moving out of the darkness directly toward him.

"Halt, who goes there?" he demanded.

Hands in the air to avoid any suspicion of an attack the two shadowy figures moved forward.

"Advance and be recognized," continued the sentry.

The travelers, shuffling along in the dark, saluted the crossroads policeman.

"Two members of Company A, Third Regiment, United States Engineers, just escaped through the German line," said Bob Grier, with great effort.

Fighting their way through the dark, numbed by the cold and completely fatigued by their harrowing experiences, Bob and

Chick Wharton had at last arrived within sight of their own lines.

"You will have to be identified—can take no chances," drawled the guard, and forthwith called the officer of the guard, who was stationed near by in the cellar of a demolished French chateau.

To that officer Bob and Chick told their story—sufficient to convince the Englishman, together with the credentials they bore in the way of insignia, they really were American engineers.

Then the Brighton boys learned that a number of other stragglers had made their way in during the night.

"Did you see anything of Captain James Bennett, or Colonel Reynolds, or Corporal Joe Smalley?" asked Bob despairingly.

"Cawnt tell you matie: Hi haint 'ad the pleasure of meeting the gentlemen or knowing them by their names, old top," yawned the English lieutenant.

Without further parley the boys were admitted within the lines and sent to the rear under escort. As they went along they beheld many English troops who had been brought up during the day and learned that the Germans, according to report, had con-

centrated in great numbers and commenced a counter-attack along the entire Cambrai front.

"Too bad for all those engineers caught out there today in that barrage," remarked the Canadian who was conducting the boys to headquarters.

"Have they heard from many of them?" asked Bob, eager to know the truth and yet afraid it might carry the information that many of his friends from Chesterton were still among the missing.

"I'm afraid quite a number of them were caught," answered the escort. "We've been rounding them up as fast as they drifted in, and its not possible for me to say just how many have returned."

From the Canadian the boys heard how relief forces sent out to the rescue of the American engineers after the German barrage had been laid down had in turn encountered the advancing Prussian Guards and had engaged in a severe fight. It appeared the rescuers had come in contact with the main body of the engineers but that a number of widely separated working parties had been cut off with possible dire consequences.

Arriving at headquarters the boys were

overjoyed to find Colonel Reynolds in consultation with Brigadier General Rankinson, the English officer commanding this particular sector. They saluted and then were warmly greeted by their American chief and the English general. In detail the boys related their experiences of the afternoon and night, after which they were directed to turn in for a much needed rest.

As they saluted and wheeled a familiar voice greeted them close at hand.

"Uncle Jim!" Bob and Chick exclaimed in unison—and then stiffly saluted their captain.

"Thank God, boys, you are back: I had almost given both up as lost," the old yard foreman returned with a trace of emotion in his voice. "Tell me how you got through."

"Tell us, too, how you got back," solicited Chick. It was a joyful reunion. With an arm around the shoulder of each youth Captain Bennett led them away to their quarters. Remnants of Company A were billeted in a block of French homes along a narrow street, and a census was being taken to determine how many of them were still missing.

"Uncle Jim" told his story in great detail

while the three sat chatting in front of a fireplace in what had once been the home of a French wine merchant, who had now been dead for several years and his family scattered in the first Hun invasion of France. He, too, had fought his way through the German lines in a desperate encounter. A number of lads from Chesterton had gone down fighting bravely, among them Head-light Harry Kavanaugh and poor old Buster Raleigh.

"What became of Al Schmidt, the fellow who was guarding the engine of our train whom you questioned sharply as to how it got away?" asked Bob.

"O, he got through all right—was one of the first to get back safe," replied the captain.

"Do you think he is on the level?" put in Chick quizzically.

"I don't know, my boy" answered the old yard foreman. "I never did like that fellow. He came along to the C. & W. back home in Chesterton with the proper credentials, carrying a brotherhood card and giving an account of how he had worked for a long time on the Pere Marquette. But he always kept pretty much to himself, and there never

was any one around Chesterton that had ever known him, or knew anything about him. Gave a good account of himself that night he was quizzed about the wreck of No. 87, and he seems to know a lot about railroading. Anyway, I'm going to keep a sharp eye on him and I wish you fellows would too. Next time anything suspicious happens around where he's working I'm going to have the army secret service get on his trail and look him up."

The two Brighton chums told their friendly guardian of their own experiences in the retreat, of the scene in the dugout and of their own hazardous escape through the German lines. Captain Bennett had as yet no report on Corporal Smalley; nor had any one seen or heard aught of the little fellow.

"Hope he got away safely and will turn in here during the night" said Bob wistfully as his captain arose to go.

"So do I—there's an ace for you, as brave as a lion and a fighter from the hat on his head to the shoes on his feet," chimed in Chick.

"I hope so, too, boys," added Captain Bennett. "Several searching parties are going

out at 2 o'clock to look for stragglers. He may have been wounded, and in that case I hope our boys find him. Goodnight!"

With a friendly hand clasp Uncle Jim was gone leaving the boys free to turn in for the much needed rest. The boche were content to rest on their laurels for the night and let it pass without incident.

At four o'clock, however, General Rankinson, commanding the sector ordered every sleeping man on duty in preparation for any possible attack at daybreak. As Bob and Chick tumbled out of their lodge to fall in with Company A of the Engineers they stumbled in the darkness over a trio of travelers making their way slowly down the alley way that was called street. Two men were supporting a third who limped along in the center.

"Lets see who it is—maybe it's one of our boys just got in," suggested Bob.

They turned back and hailed the trio.

"Who have you got there buddies?" called Chick in a cheery voice. "Can we be of any service?"

The voice that answered stirred their pulses.

"Good enough fellows, here we all are together again."

"Well, by crackey, am I dreaming, or does that voice deceive me?" demanded Bob enthusiastically.

To make sure he leaped forward and looked well into the face of the limping figure.

"Joe Smalley, as I live," cried both boys in delight, literally falling upon their returned corporal. "What happened to you?" they demanded almost in unison.

"Went down with a sprained ankle out there. Tried to walk but could only hobble on one foot. Wound in hand got hurting to beat the band. Got floundering around out there like an old lady with the rheumatics. Don't know what would have happened to me if a British patrol hadn't come up and plucked me out of No Man's Land. But, here I am, and there you are, and here we all are together again. Glory be, bo!"

Bob and his chum had to hurry along but later in the morning had an opportunity to hear Smalley's story more in detail. They were more than happy that the doughty little corporal who had engineered their break through the German lines had returned again, especially when a roll call showed more than a third of the boys of Company

A still among the missing. Lieutenant Overman had never come back, and a bunch of the Upland Valley boys recruited from Chesterton in Companies C and D had either fallen in the surprise attack or been taken prisoner by the boche.

For a few weeks the Third Regiment of Engineers worked with the English army in support of the Allied line in the Cambrai sector. Efforts were being made to hold the precious ground that General Byng and his gallant warriors had earned in their remarkable winter attack. But the scarcity of fighting men and the necessity of spreading them out over a long line made it a difficult task.

"Once our boys get over here in goodly numbers there will be nothing to it," Uncle Jim Bennett had remarked one day in conversation with his two Brighton proteges. "Give the Allies a reserve of fighting men, or put some real live Yankees up there in front for a while and hold the tired British bulldogs in reserve for a time until they get a chance to recuperate from the long strain of this campaign, and the Hun will soon turn tail and run."

"Think there is any chance of our boys getting over here before long?" Bob had queried.

"Think so? I know so," his captain answered. "Uncle Sam is going into this business in earnest, determined to make short work of the war. Wait until the Fourth of July and the German flag will be moving backward instead of forward, or even holding its own."

After a while it became evident that the Germans were preparing for a huge counter-attack aimed at driving General Byng's army out of the salient it had driven into the Hindenburg line. In fact, it was soon launched in wild fury with all the resources the boche could command.

But instead of getting into the fighting in the front line trenches as they had expected, the Third Regiment of Engineers was ordered back to do railway service under French auspices. Early in March came the order transferring them to the city of Amiens.

Captain Bennett informed Bob and Chick that the plan was to break up the regiment and distribute it in the railroad yards at Amiens for service in the operation of the French railways. The drain on French manpower had quite depleted the French operative forces and it had been decided to press the American railway engineers into train service,

although the original plan had been to keep them on construction work and the like until American railway supplies and forces had arrived in goodly number.

"Before very long you will see American locomotives and American freight and box cars over here running on American rails and manned by American train crews," said Uncle Jim proudly. "In the meantime we are going to give the Frenchmen a help. We've got to help keep munitions and food flowing up there to the trenches or the English won't be able to hold out against the Huns."

"What are you going to do with us?" asked Bob by way of finding out what was to be his part in the new assignment.

"Reckon I can find something in the big yard here in Amiens to keep you fellows busy—clerking in the storehouses or supervising the loading of trains and their make-up."

"Like fun you will," cut in Chick seriously. "We gotta be out on the firing line, ain't so chum?"

Bob was all attention. "Sure thing, Uncle Jim: we didn't come over here to grab off an easy job in the background."

"But what can you fellows do? You

never worked on a railroad, did you?" the old yard foreman interrupted.

"Do?" shot back Chick. "Say, we haven't been around Chesterton all our lives doing nothing. I know an engine from her cow-catcher to the knuckle coupling on her tender, and—"

"But you don't know French rolling stock," interpolated Captain Bennett.

"Say, if I can't fire one of those dinkey French locomotives I'll eat my khaki shirt," snorted Chick, a bit "peeved."

"And if I'm not capable of braking one of those '*Cheveaux 8 Hommes 40*' switch-back trains I'll get off the map of Europe," retorted Bob.

The boys had had a lot of fun at the French cars marked "Horses 8, Men 40" that they had observed upon their arrival in France, and compared them with the huge boxcars on the C. & W. at home.

It didn't take long for them to convince Uncle Jim they were in earnest about getting into active railroad service.

"All right, boys; I'll not stand in the way of your service, and I know the French will welcome you with open arms," Captain Bennett agreed without further parley.

CHAPTER XI

WITH THE FRENCH AT AMIENS

I'VE good news for you, boys," called out Captain Bennett a few days later as he approached Bob and Chick in the round-house at Amiens where the two Brighton boys were inspecting a French locomotive that was undergoing some minor repairs.

They wheeled together to salute their captain.

"You are both assigned to the same crew by order of the French divisional superintendent. I put Wharton's name in as a fireman—he said he could get away with one of the French engines—and you, Bob, are to go out as flagman. You will probably be glad to know that your old friend, Corporal Smalley, is to be engineer of your crew. He has been going over the line the last few days and went up this morning at the throttle on a supply train with a French supervisor at his back. He's a clever chap and it took him no time to master the little French engine."

"Great!" chattered the two Brighton boys.

"Furthermore, I've put that chap Al Schmidt in with you fellows as brakeman," continued Bennett. "I want him where he can be watched carefully all the time, and I know of no better bunch of vigilants than you fellows."

"You can count on us to keep him under cover," was Bob's comment.

"As yet we don't have the goods on him in any way," explained Captain Bennett, "but you never can tell where these Hun spies are planted and it is just as well to be on the guard. Take no chances on him."

For their conductor, Captain Bennett explained, Jacques Fournier, an old veteran French railroader had been assigned in keeping with the policy to have at least one Frenchman with each of the American crews.

"When do we take our first train out?" asked Bob, greatly pleased that his and Chick's requests for active service at the front had been acceded to.

"You may hold yourself in readiness for a call at any time," the captain replied. "Probably on Joe Smalley's next trip out. He comes back tonight and may be called upon tomorrow or, at least, the day following."

During the afternoon the boys took further instruction in the manning of a French anti-aircraft gun. It had been explained to them that every French transport carrying supplies to the front had in its complement of rolling stock a flat car on which an anti-aircraft gun was mounted. This was as a safeguard against aircraft attacks and the crews were expected to know how to operate the guns and to man them in the event of an attack from the skies. In the modern warfare that included the airplane as a new instrument of attack the machines were employed advantageously by both sides in bombing raids aimed at the destruction of supply trains and munition transports.

"Got a kick in her, hasn't she?" chuckled Bob as the gun spat its fire wickedly into the heavens under their direction.

"Goodnight, I should say so," answered Chick as he sprang to open the breech for the insertion of another charge.

Schmidt was standing by taking it all in carefully. It was his first instruction by the French officer in charge of the railroad crews, but the new brakeman of the crew proved himself adept in learning the parts of the gun and its method of operation.



"GOT A KICK IN HER, HASN'T SHE?" CHUCKLED BOB

"Doesn't seem like a bad sort after all," reasoned Bob a half hour later as he and Chick turned in to prepare for the evening mess that was served a la carte in a number of cars that had been fitted up to serve the railroad men with hot food on short order right in the railroad yard.

"No, now that I've come to know him better," replied Chick. "I'm for giving every fellow a square deal until I get the goods on him. We don't know how that wreck happened back there in Chesterton just before we left home, and we don't know how our engine got away over there at Gouzeaucourt. Do we?"

"No, and probably we never will. If Schmidt pulled either trick he is a smooth proposition and will bear watching."

"Smooth if he got by Uncle Sam into the service you mean."

"Yes, but that's been done before; there are slick men in every race, the world over."

So the boys argued on the relative merits of the brakeman assigned to their crew and finally agreed that under the circumstances the best thing for them to do was to work in friendly fashion with Schmidt, give him the benefit of the doubt—but to keep a sharp weather eye peeled for him.

Of all the remarkable railroad experiences the two boys ever had had at Chesterton the best was reserved for this first night in the French city of Amiens where several regiments of American engineers had been mobilized during the day. There were railroaders from all over the United States—north, east, south and west; veteran engineers who had come over to give France a lift, fireman who had lifted the mighty express trains of the west over “the Great Divide;” conductors, brakemen, flagmen, car inspectors, repairmen, trackmen and every variety of skilled workman essential to the operation of a railroad system, and representing nearly every large railway concern in the United States. Volunteers had been called for, and the early details hastily molded into regiments for quick overseas’ service.

Tales were told that night that would have made the blood of any boy run swift with delight; stories of wrecks and holdups and rescues and races. One breezy chap from Wyoming had his audience hanging on the ropes with his story of how he had started his railroad career by running away from home and after being locked in a box car in Denver while stealing a ride to the

Pacific coast nearly froze to death going over the Rocky mountains. A Boston & Albany conductor got close attention while he told of the wreck of a circus train he once hauled and how the animals and reptiles escaped from the wreckage and ran amuck among the farms and small towns of the vicinity. Jake Sampson, a Pennsylvania veteran, came to bat with a story of a runaway locomotive that broke away on the famous Horseshoe curve near Pittsburgh and ran unmolested down the Allegheny mountains through the city of Altoona until it had spent itself without hitting a single thing. So it continued into the night.

"Guess we better turn in, Bob," suggested Chick. "We are apt to be called out early in the morning for our first run."

"Yes, and I'm tired, too," said Bob with a recollection of the strenuous day he had put in acquainting himself with the rudiments of French railroading.

Their quarters were close up to all the noise and confusion of the busy little French railroad center with its stores of precious freight for the Allied armies now stanchly holding the line against the German counter-advance. But in spite of it all the boys

slept as easily as though at home in the good old "dorms" at Brighton.

Just as Chick had anticipated their first call into active service as railroad men came with the early dawn. They were aroused from slumber at four o'clock and told they were to take a train out of the Amiens yard at 5:30 bound for the British supply base "somewhere at the front."

"Good enough, I'm ready to get going," declared Bob as he tumbled out of his bunk and into his uniform.

Chick was in fine humor considering his usual eight hours' sleep had been curtailed by the summary call to duty.

"Wonder what they would say at Chester-ton if we turned out there for work same as we do here?" pondered Chick as he surveyed his chum.

Instead of overalls the boys wore the neat khaki uniforms of the engineers. Instead of railroad caps they wore the tin hats, or helmets, of the trenches. Each man carried a heavy automatic revolver that he was supposed to keep handy for use at all times.

"Ought to dress 'em up this way for protection against train robbers over in the States," observed Chick humorously.

"Never mind, chum; you may run into something every whit as bold and bad as a train robber," retorted his chum.

Going up through the railroad yard to report on duty at the roundhouse the two Brighton boys ran into their captain. Uncle Jim had been assigned to the big terminal in Amiens to assist the French authorities in getting out the mammoth stores that were rushed daily to the fighting forces at the front. He was just going on duty for the day.

Bob and Chick saluted. It was always a formal salute such as any buck private would give his captain; but between them there existed the warmest feeling of friendship. The captain was more like a father to the boys than a superior officer.

"Where you bound for now?" he inquired, surveying the two manly forms that confronted him.

They explained that they were going out on their first trip.

"Good luck to you, boys; I'll be watching for you on your return and thinking of you all the time you are making your first trip," rejoined Uncle Jim affectionately.

At the roundhouse the boys parted. Chick

went in to find Corporal Smalley—his engineer—while Bob drifted on up into the yard to where he knew Jacques Fournier would probably be found looking over the train that had been made up for the run to the front.

Half an hour later the little French locomotive, with Smalley at the throttle and Chick at the fireboy's station came gliding up the yard ready for the day's trip. Bob could not help note the great difference between the little French engine and the huge moguls that he had been accustomed to seeing on the Upland Valley and the C. & W. at home. More striking yet was the picture of his old Brighton chum standing nonchalantly in the fire pit.

"Ah, monsieurs, good morning," saluted Jacques Fournier as the locomotive came to a stop and the conductor climbed up for a word with his new engine crew.

Bob followed suit and paused alongside Chick.

"This is the life, eh boy?" with an elbow dig in the ribs.

"You said something," chanted Chick, glancing at the steam gauge and yanking the door of the fire pit open. Chick had

No. 17—the little French locomotive—popping with a full head of steam, and all ready to go.

“Where’s your brakeman?” asked Wharton.

“You mean Schmidt? Oh, he’s over in the caboose waiting for us to come along—not at all sociable,” complained Bob.

“Better watch him all the time,” cautioned Chick.

Just then Captain Bennett came running alongside and swung himself up on the locomotive platform.

“Ready to go gents?” he inquired.

“*Oui, monsieur,*” answered Fournier.

“And with such a fine crew watch us deliver the goods—is that what you call it in America?” continued the Frenchman in his best English.

“*Oui, oui!*” chorused the Americans.

Engineer Smalley and conductor Fournier had their running orders from the chief train despatcher of the division and it was only a question of coupling locomotive and caboose to their train of camp supplies—and then off to the front!

“So long, boys, see you later,” called out Uncle Jim as he swung down out of the locomotive.

CHAPTER XII

ATTACKED FROM THE SKIES

THIRTY-ONE cars in all composed the train turned over to conductor Jacques Fournier and his first American crew this April morning in the French railway yard at Amiens. Most of them were filled with footstuffs consigned to the fighting French and English armies that held the German line at bay on the great line running south from Ypres in the far north to the big bend in the Hindenburg line near the French city of Soissons.

It was not within the power of the yard foreman who started the supply train forth on its mission or the train despatcher who gave it a clear block to say how far the train could proceed on its day's journey. By now the Germans had fully recovered from the surprise attack dealt their defenses by General Byng at Cambrai and were counter-attacking in the first rushes of a forward movement that was destined to carry German

arms almost to the gates of Paris by mid-summer.

Nor could conductor Fournier or engineer Smalley venture an opinion as to how far they would get during the day with their army provender. Amiens was known to be the big objective of the Germans on this portion of the battle front. With it in their possession they would be in an advantageous position to strike directly for the French coast cities and cut off the Belgian and English armies in the northern part of France from the main body of the French army and English reserves reaching away round to Verdun.

It was up to the "contemptible little English army"—as Lord Kitchener's first English troops in France had been styled by the Hun—to maintain a strong hold on the city of Amiens. It was the great strategic center for which the mighty armies were to fight these next few months. And it was distinctly up to the Allied railway forces to keep the necessary food supplies and munitions moving up to the front line trenches. These supplies were delivered in Amiens by rail from the French seaports and thence carried forward in small special trains, or

“flyers”—the English called them—as close as it was possible to proceed by rail. In case rail transportation was interrupted the ever reliable motor transport service was available.

No one could prophecy in the precarious times how far a supply train would get on its day's run. A German advance during the night might carry directly over the line traversed by the long steel trail of the Allies that led back to their bases of supply. Deadly barrages or long-distance shell-fire might tear up the track. Air attacks directed against the moving trains were likely occurrences, or it was the policy of both the Allies and the Germans, working with the new “spies of the air”—the airplane—to bomb supply trains wherever and whenever possible in the hope of cutting off advance troops and compelling their withdrawal through lack of supplies.

None of these things, however, were in the minds of the two Brighton boys—Chick Wharton and his chum Bob Grier—as their train rolled out of the yard at Amiens and began to gather speed for the dash to the front. It was their first railway trip actually in the service as trainmen. To the novelty

of this was combined the thrill of being close up to the battle front and running all the time closer to being directly "under fire."

As flagman of the crew it was Bob's duty to stick faithfully to the rear of the train. In the event of a hasty stop or a derailment of any kind it was up to him to hasten back over the ties for a quarter of a mile or more and guard the rear end of his train against the dangers of any approaching train. In the day time a red flag was used; at night a red lantern. At other times he assisted the conductor and brakeman in various details connected with the operation of the train. In these war times the train crew had but one objective—to deliver their freight at the front, and every man worked at whatever task was allotted him.

There was just a breath of spring in the April air as the train wended its way along through the open French country, flashing through one small town after another. Trains going up to the front had right of way over all trains returning to the bases of supplies, including even the hospital trains with their cargoes of human salvage from the battlefields. West bound trains occupied the sidings

permitting the loaded trains to flit trenchward at full speed.

"At home we call this the fast freight," smiled Bob at the big French conductor who stood with him on the rear of the little French caboose, or cabin, waving at a group of French children on a station platform now receding into the distance.

"*Oui, monsieur, et ees fast,*" replied the Frenchman in his best English. Fournier, born and raised in the city of Amiens had been long in railway service in his native country. Before the war he had known little of the English language; but now, after more than three years close association with the millions of gallant allies who had poured into France from the British Isles—and now from America—a warm spirit of friendship was enkindled.

Al Schmidt, the brakeman, was no where in sight as the two trainmen turned into the cabin after watching the flashing scenery for some miles.

"Where is monsieur Schmidt?" asked Fournier as he took up his dinner pail and fished out a ration of butterless bread.

"Reckon he's somewhere out on the train, sir," answered Bob. "Last time I saw him

was while we were getting out of the yard back in Amiens. Was standing ten or twelve cars lengths ahead."

"Not so sociable, is he?" continued the conductor.

"Not so you could notice," laughed Bob.

"Know him well before you left home?"

"Nearly a stranger to me. I only saw him once or twice in all my life before we all signed up with the Third Regiment of Engineers."

"All right is he?"

"So far as I know. They seemed to think he was O. K. back at Chesterton. Born in America, he told them, and loyal citizen despite his Germanic name. Once that I know of he was in a shady place over home and once again over here, but each time seemed to have a good answer."

And then Bob told his conductor all about the mysterious wrecks in the yards of the big railroad junction at Chesterton, and of the disappearance of the locomotive in the German attack at Gouzeaucourt when the American engineers had been stranded in No Man's Land.

"Sounds funny, don't it boy?" was Fournier's rather sarcastic rejoinder.

Bob's eyes narrowed as he mentally calculated keeping a sharp scrutiny of the silent brakeman whom Captain Jim Bennett had said was to be watched "all the time."

After a time Fournier went forward over the tops of the cars to see that all was well and to have a chat with the engineer up front. Bob was free to enjoy life as he pleased. With the train under way he had naught to do except stand to his place of duty at the rear of the train and be ready for any service.

After a time he climbed up into the fo'castle—the "cupola," as the boys at home called the superstructure of the cabin. Reclining easily on a cushioned platform one could look through long open windows directly along the line of the train ahead, to the sides or to the rear.

From this vantage point Bob surveyed the country in every direction. Stretching out in a sinewy line like the serpentine trail of a great adder the train of precious freight before him curved and straightened to the trend of the track. Occasionally as the swaying cars lurched to the fill of a curve Bob got a view of the hardworking French locomotive where Smalley and Wharton, the

engine crew, were putting No. 17 through her best paces.

Half way up the length of the train, sitting carelessly on the ledge of a freight car, kicking his feet and taking life easy, was brakeman Schmidt. Bob noted that he was but two cars removed from the flat car on which the fast freight's air artillery was mounted.

"Its a cinch he'll not be worth a tinker's hoop if we have to go into business with the archies," muttered Bob to himself as he surveyed the brakeman.

Two and a half hours steady running brought the supply train to its first stop, a watering station just on the outskirts of an old French village that plainly showed where the hell of the Hun had been set in its first march toward Paris in 1914.

Bob had an opportunity to go forward for a few minutes leaving conductor Fournier and brakeman Schmidt at the rear of the train. The young flagman found his chum hard at work breaking up huge lumps of soft coal in the tender of the locomotive.

"Hello, chum, how do you like it?" called out Bob as he swung up into the locomotive. Chick dropped his pickax and turned to his old Brighton roommate.

"Bully, bully!" came the answer. "Keeps a fellow going at first but I'll soon be used to it. And anyhow these French engines aren't nearly so hard to fire as one of the big boys back home. They don't eat as much."

"Never mind, chum; pretty soon our own made-in-America 'attaboys' right from Baldwin's will be over here—and then good-night for you," sallied Bob good naturedly.

Chick smiled.

"Say, man, by that time I'll be an engineer!" he boasted facetiously. "Just like my good friend Corporal Smalley over there at the throttle of No. 17."

Smalley overheard the remark and turned to greet Bob. He had been tinkering with the oil feed of the engine.

"I'll say he's got the makings, judging from the manner in which he feeds this little steel baby," was the engineer's jocular tribute to his side partner in the cab of No. 17.

Chick avowed he would be happy to stay for a very long time with his friends Smalley and Grier.

Ten minutes stop and then the train was off again. By now it was necessary to keep a sharp lookout, for their travels had brought

them within the zones of aerial activity. On every hand were abundant signs that the fighting lines were not so far off.

"I'll station myself on the artillery car to be ready with Schmidt in the event of any air attack the rest of the way up to the front," Fournier had said as the train got under way.

Bob's orders were to keep to the rear of the train and in the event of an attack rush forward and help man the gun. He had hardly settled himself to his post in the lookout of the cabin, and it seemed the train had proceeded only a few miles from the watering town when the shadow of impending danger loomed out of the sky.

Across the mottled blue and white field of sky lifting from the line of the horizon to eastward loomed up a procession of the winged cavalry of the air!

Bob sat for a few moments fascinated at the sight. Majestically the leaders of the immense squadron led their caravan forward. Indistinct as they were the freight flagman had no idea of their identity. They seemed to be flitting to and fro like so many birds.

But in another moment the real import of the picture spread before his eyes was

revealed. One gallant machine careened suddenly in its course and shot earthward at fearful velocity. It had been shot down in action—a battle raging in the air almost directly overhead. To a novice like Bob Grier, seeing his first aerial battle, the significance of the scene had not dawned upon him with its first revelation. But now it was all clear.

“Bombers!—and no doubt after us!” ejaculated Bob to himself as he realized now only too seriously that German airmen were contesting with Allied birdmen for the supremacy of the blue and white sky just above.

For a time the little French train flitted steadily forward while the young American flagman sat spellbound in the lookout of the cabin, an eye-witness to the battle. But soon came other and more startling developments to jar the youth out of his reveries. Like a mighty meteor out of the limitless space a great bomb crashed to earth not more than sixty yards to the right of the swaying train. The detonation shook the earth with the force of an earthquake.

Now to the other side of the train burst a second bomb and scattered a hail of earth and rocks that spattered the speeding cars.

Looking up from his post of observation Bob beheld a giant bombing machine circling almost directly overhead. Upon one of its massive wings was outlined an iron cross—the insignia of the German birdman.

At sight of the machine and realization of the attack Bob sprang down the ladder of the cabin, vaulted to the top of the first freight car and made his way rapidly forward, leaping from one car top to another with the agility of a cat.

“Now for a taste of their own medicine,” he bellowed, unmindful of his own danger and thinking only of getting the anti-aircraft gun into action with the assistance of conductor Fournier and brakeman Schmidt.

CHAPTER XIII

STALLED IN A TUNNEL

ONE misstep and the boy would be flung from the fast moving train to serious injury or death. But Bob sensed nothing of this as he hurried along intent upon getting the aerial gun into action as quickly as possible. Gazing ahead for a moment just after leaping the yawning chasm from one box car to another Bob saw conductor Fournier already at his station and Schmidt hurrying forward from three or four cars further ahead.

“Now we’ll have a chance to see how our friend handles himself under fire,” thought Bob as he leaped along “over the top” of the train.

Bombs were splattering the earth on either side the train by now, apparently more than one of the Hun machines having turned its attention to the French trench freight. Others were flitting to and fro over the country looking for supply bases of all kinds. All the time a handful of allied airplanes were

engaging the Hun birdmen in combat and endeavoring to stand them off until wireless calls from the English and French aviators would bring reinforcements.

By general agreement the engineers of these trains bearing supplies directly up to the firing line had decided that in the event of air attacks they would "open her up wide" and make a run for it. The danger of derailment on the hastily constructed tracks was no greater than the menace of the sky-pilots with their wicked bombs, and the railroaders were out to deliver the goods at the front or die trying.

Engineer Smalley, at the first sign of attack, had pulled wide the throttle of No. 17, and the little locomotive was dancing along at its best speed. Darting to and fro, first around one curve and then another, the train afforded a movable target for the airmen, and it was more luck than accurate gunnery when bombing shots struck home.

Bob thought of these things as he closed in on the armored car—but only for a moment. The spirit of adventure was uppermost in his mind and he reveled in the fun of out-witting the enemy and, better yet, putting him to rout with a bunch of well placed

shots from the "archie" on the armored car.

As he leaped the last car separating him from the traveling battery and sped forward to take his place Bob glanced up just in time to see conductor Fournier tugging impatiently at the breech and addressing Schmidt in angry tones. Instantly Bob divined something was wrong.

"Ah, monsieur, some very, very dirty work here—isn't that what you call it?" wailed Jacques turning to the young flagman.

"What's wrong now?" commanded Bob. No use to ask for he seemed to know only too well that something was wrong with the gun.

"This! This!" exclaimed Fournier in hot wrath indicating the armored car's prime offensive weapon. "It is out of commission—no good—completely wrecked," moaned the disconsolate Frenchman.

Schmidt was gazing intently into the mechanism of the ordnance and muttering to himself in undertones.

"What's the matter with it, Al?" interrogated Bob rather petulantly.

Schmidt hadn't the least idea what was wrong, except that the gun was, indeed,

completely *hors du combat*. Bob ran his eye over the "archie" as Fournier feverishly pointed to the breech cap.

As though some giant had wielded a huge ax with deadly effect, the gun was marred and battered about the breech cap in such a manner that while it was possible to load the piece there was no way to close the breech. The lanyard was completely gone.

"Ah, *mon dieu!*" The Frenchman was fairly frothing with anger.

"Some one shall pay dearly for this," added the conductor. Wheeling he faced Schmidt. Stepping up close to the brakeman and gazing full into his eyes Fournier addressed him.

"Did you see any one tampering with this gun?" he began.

Schmidt pleaded ignorance of all circumstances in relation to the disablement of the gun. He was angry in turn and came right back at his accuser.

"Who are you talking to? And in that manner!" he began. "I want you to distinctly understand that I am an American and will have no Frenchman accusing me of any rough work. What do I know about the gun? It was all right when we started, wasn't it?"

Fournier agreed. He turned to Bob.

"Monsieur Grier, did you see any suspicious characters lurking about the armored car either in the yard at Amiens or on the way up?"

Bob avowed he had noted nothing wrong at any time, and added further, that, while on duty in the cupola of the cabin he had kept a sharp watch over the entire train so far as he could while it was wending its way around curve after curve, shooting through short tunnels and bridges.

"Very strange," muttered the Frenchman as he gave the gun a final examination and wheeled away in disgust.

Bob who had dropped back to observe the pursuing airplanes made still another discovery.

"Look! Shells all gone, too!" he cried.

Ammunition for the archie had been racked along the rear of the armored car within easy reach of the gun crew. Giant supports had held it in place and there had been stored more than two score of the 3.3 shells that fitted the bore of the big gun.

"Not a single one left," shouted Bob above the roar of the train as the conductor and brakeman leaped to his side.

Schmidt appeared nonplussed and was savagely denouncing the "outrage" in expository tones. As for Fournier—he simply extended his arms heavenward with a typical French posture of despair.

"Some one has been aboard this train since we made our last stop back there at the watering tank, heaved the shells overboard and put the 3.3 clean out of business," mumbled Bob to himself as he surveyed the damage.

Consternation over the plight of the armored car gave way to apprehension of another kind when Fournier chanced to glance up into the sky again. What he beheld was two giant Gothas of the German squadron that were skimming closer to earth with every revolution of their fast turning propellor blades. Spotting the allied freight train, the Hun machines had succeeded in breaking through the defensive line of the French and British air cavalry and were free-lancing now apparently unmolested.

"Oh, monsieur, soon they will dive directly upon us," exclaimed the Frenchman.

In eager tones he described how the bird-men, once having exhausted their stores of bombs, invariably dove down wherever

it was possible to get through the Allied air lines, and poured deadly machine gun fire into supply trains. In this way they could annoy the transports and very often put them out of commission by striking down their crews with well directed gun fire.

Fournier declared that it was better they remained on the armored car where they would be just as safe from attack as any other place on the train. The three trainmen sprawled out on the platform of the car and riveted their attention upon the enemy hovering above.

"It is up to our engine crew to carry us forward rapidly until those nasty gnats up there can be driven off," commented Fournier as he noted the maneuvers of the Hun birdmen.

Of a sudden the leader of the two Gothas turned the nose of his machine sharply at an angle of forty or fifty degrees and volplaned toward earth at a dizzy pace.

"He's after us now!" shouted Fournier.

The Frenchman was right. With a desperate dive the German pilot came on until it seemed his machine must crash into the earth. Then when the astonished railway men deemed the wreck of the airplane inevi-

table the pilot of the flyer brought her nose up sharply and lifted off the earth as gracefully as a bird. Tilting upward ever so slightly the sky pilot skimmed close up toward the very side of the careening train.

"He's going to turn that suicide gun on us," screamed the French conductor, meaning the rapid fire gun in the cockpit of the big Gotha.

It was exactly that the Hun birdman did. As he came close up to the flat armored car on which the three trainmen crouched under the shelter of their dismantled 3.3 "archie" the observer in the airplane who was likewise the gunner opened a deadly fire. Whistling like the wind the bullets from the machine gun rattled off the flat surface of the car. In an instant the airplane was carried upward and away from its target by the momentum and direction of its flight.

"Anybody hit?" cried Fournier gazing about him. Bob had remained with the conductor under the protection of the ordnance piece. Under the shelter of its long steel body and the wings set up especially to protect the gunners both were safe.

"Not a scratch here," called back Bob.

"Nor here either," answered Fournier.

Schmidt emerged from the shelter of the shell rack at the end of the car into which he had dived as the airplane dived close. He, too, had escaped unscathed.

The train was bowling along at twenty-five kilometers an hour and swaying wildly from side to side. Smalley was crowding on all steam and making the supreme effort of his life to outrun the Huns in the race to save the precious stores of foodstuffs that meant rations for the fighters in the trenches.

Well, too, the Hun knew the value of the cargo—and his birdmen were out to destroy the train, or maim the crew. In another moment the German birdman had turned and returned to the attack. Fournier, who had been through several such battles, knew full well the dangers of the situation.

"They are coming back!" he shouted to Bob, motioning him to the shelter of the gun shield.

Then, as he gazed about the country through which the train was speeding in its wild flight, an inspiration flashed through the mind of the wily Frenchman.

"Listen, monsieur Grier," he yelled above the pounding of the wheels on the rails. "Two and a half kilometers ahead there is a

short tunnel this side the village of Romey. Once there we are safe. Monsieur Smalley, our engineer, has been through it, of course, but probably is not thinking of it now. He should know so that he might stop his train in the tunnel. Then we would be safe from these infernal vultures. If you will wait here I will go forward and—”

Bob never waited to hear the completion of the sentence.

“Pardon, monsieur, it is I who will go forward and tell the engineer,” he corrected.

The Frenchman made a deprecating gesture. But Bob was not to be denied and started to go.

“*Oui!* if you must have the honor,” said the Frenchman with a shrug of the shoulder and a gallant courtesy to the youthful American.

“I am young—and—besides, I want to go,” expostulated Bob emphatically.

The Frenchman was quite agreed, meanwhile giving Bob further instructions.

“Tell monsieur Smalley to watch for the next bridge spanning the Somme,” he explained. “Just on the other side is a tunnel. Once inside he can stop in safety. As you go I will stand by the machine gun over in

the corner and give the German a sting of his own serpent when he comes back. Go, quick!"

Bob leaped from the shelter of the gun and in another moment was atop the string of reeling freight cars leaving Fournier and Schmidt to battle with the returning birdmen.

Little did he know, either, as he sped away toward the locomotive with his all-important message for engineer Smalley that the machine gun on the armored car also had been put out of commission by the "unseen hand" leaving the trainmen quite without protection save for the automatic revolvers they carried.

CHAPTER XIV

FIGHTING FOR LIFE AMID GAS

BOB'S journey toward the locomotive was interrupted by the return of the attacking birdman. As the lad hurried along the tops of the cars the aviators came fluttering close again to the trim little supply train. This time they seemed intent on ramming the locomotive. Bob gulped hard as he saw the Gotha was belching its fire at No. 17, and he was praying hard that his old chum Chick Wharton would escape unhurt in the rail of steel pellets from the Hun machine gun.

After what seemed a long time Bob arrived finally at the tender of the locomotive. With feverish grip he seized the rungs of the steel ladder reaching to the tender platform. He fairly hurled himself across the intervening space filled with soft coal to the cabin of the locomotive. The sight that greeted his eyes chilled him to the bone.

Crouched in the corner close to the fire-box knelt his good old chum Chick Wharton

with one arm hanging limp. As best he could the injured fireman was trying to stanch the flow of blood and adjust a bandage. Smalley was at the throttle alternately watching the flying track ahead and telling Wharton how to tie a tourniquet.

"How did you get it?" exclaimed Bob breathlessly.

In broken sentences Wharton explained how the airmen in one of their dives at the locomotive had let loose a spitfire of machine gun bullets, one of which had nipped him in the arm.

"But I'm all right," was the old Brighton fullback's jaunty reply. "Just give the old girl a few scoopfuls of coal will you to keep her in good trim."

Bob remembered first of all his instructions from conductor Fournier and sprang to the side of the engineer to impart the information.

"Tunnel directly ahead just on other side of bridge," he yelled in the ears of the engineer. "Fournier says stop your train in there and you are safe from attack."

Smalley nodded understandingly and immediately cut off the power, permitting the train to drift under its own momentum. From the engineer's position Bob had a

clear view of the track ahead with the ever-widening vista of open country. Scarce half a kilometer ahead loomed the outlines of a bridge. The signal block was set for clear and the engineer knew the bridge had so far withstood German efforts to put it out of commission.

Bob's next move was to give No. 17 a little more fuel. He was new at the game but knew the principles of firing just the same from years of observation in the railroad yards back home at Chesterton. Swinging open the door of the firebox he buried the shovel in the coal and then sent its heaping lift broadcast over the flare of white flame inside the inferno.

"Giver her half a dozen," yelled Wharton.

Bob bent to his task and was careful to keep himself well balanced to allow for the swerve of a curve, knowing full well that to be caught off balance might mean a crashing dive off the locomotive. But he safely negotiated the coaling of the little locomotive and then turned to his chum.

Chick had lost a bit of blood from the wound but was grittily gnashing his teeth and tugging at the bandage. It only took Bob a moment with his free and active hands

to adjust a first aid bandage that would have done credit to an interne in a base hospital.

"How you feeling?" inquired Bob solicitously.

Wharton was more affected by anger for the Hun birdman who had put him temporarily out of the running than he was by the pain of his wound.

"Just like to get one shot with my automatic at that gosh-hanged German!" he sputtered.

It was up to Bob to keep No. 17 in the running under the circumstances. Making his chum as comfortable as possible he turned again to the firebox and heaped in several more scoopfuls of coal. As he turned again to his old chum the little train slid into the embrace of a bridge. Instantly Bob recalled the instructions of conductor Fournier and knew that safety was near in the shelter of the tunnel. As he peered through the cab window along the rails he could feel the general slackening of the train under the masterful hand of Joe Smalley—good old Joe who had guided the two chums out of No Man's Land at Gouzeaucourt.

"Here's where we put one over on the Hun!" called out the engineer over his shoulder

The train glided forward over the bridge without accident. Military guards were on duty at either end of the structure and their signals were "all clear" for the fast freight. Outmaneuvered now, the Hun aviators veered off sharply to the north fearing to take chances with any anti-aircraft batteries that might be camouflaged behind fortifications along the stream.

"Might as well keep on going now," suggested Bob to his wounded chum.

"Not on your life; Smalley says those chaps are likely to pick us up again on the other side," replied Wharton rather weakly. His wound was giving him much pain.

The black mouth of the tunnel yawned before the approaching train and in a moment the locomotive had taken the plunge into the darkness dragging its load of freighted cars behind it. This was a new sensation to the boys. Back home the Chesterton & Western was laid out in open farm country. What hills were encountered in railroading had been encircled rather than tunneled, and so they had never had such an experience as riding a locomotive in a tunnel.

It was straight through to the other end. A miniature archway of gray light showed

the far exit from the inky passageway—but it showed only for a brief time. Smoke and steam from the engine closed down over the trio in the cab and completely blotted out the view. To make matters worse engineer Smalley had to open the throttle again. The train had spent most of its momentum, and a slight grade leading up out of the tunnel made it necessary to put on more power.

To the steady “choo-choo” of its exhaust the toiling locomotive made its way forward. Dense smoke poured from the stack and flattening against the curved roof of the tunnel completely enveloped the train. The thick gas filled all the cab space where the boys crouched against the window seat. To an experienced railroader it was no new experience; but to a novice in tunnel traveling like Bob and Chick it was distinctly a departure.

“Got your gas-mask?” yelled Wharton in his chum’s ear.

Bob managed to tell his chum that he had left the mask back in the cabin at the rear of the train.

“If you’ve got a handkerchief tie it around your nose and mouth,” suggested Chick,

who was gasping a bit for breath. "If not a handkerchief, take this piece of waste."

Bob felt the extended arm and clasped the handful of waste. Covering his mouth and nostrils he breathed as best he could through the mass of tattered thread.

The train was slowing down to a stop. Yanking open the fire door Bob could see the shadowy figure of Joe Smalley dimly outlined on the opposite side of the cab. The engineer had his gas mask adjusted and made a gruesome picture as he sat with one hand on the air brake and the other clutching the elephantine-shaped breathing tube of the mask.

"Got your mask on?" Bob turned to his wounded companion.

There was no answer. Instead, there came the sound of guttural convulsions as of a man breathing under the extremest difficulty.

"What's the matter, chum?" cried Bob affrighted as he leaped to the fireman's station where Wharton lay limply curled.

The figure of the youth had slumped down until the head was bowed on the chest. The gas mask was but partially in its proper position to protect the injured fireman. Either Wharton had fainted from the effects

of his wound or had been overcome by the nauseous vapors of the tunnel as he struggled to adjust the mask.

No. 17 was just grinding to a stop in the smoky chamber. Bob leaped across the cab.

"Help, quick, Smalley!" he cried. "Chick Wharton's gone under."

For the moment the engineer left his post after making sure the brakes were securely set. Striking a match he applied the flickering flame to a small torch that he had wrested from behind the steam gauge. This he held over the face of his unconscious fireman.

"Wound too much for him—that and the gas combined," suggested Smalley as he pushed his mask aside to speak clearly.

Taking a tincup from a box on the tender the engineer filled it from the tank and dashed some of it in the face of Wharton. But the water had no effect upon the hard breathing youth.

"He ought to be out of here," said Smalley, shaking his head dubiously over the plight of the fireboy.

It was Chick's only chance. In his weakened condition, his lungs filled with the deadly coal fumes, the only salvation lay in getting

him out into fresh air again. Until the train got under way again it might be too late. Even to start at his moment meant a long pull to the other end.

Bob solved the problem in his own way.

"Put him on my back—I'll carry him." commanded the Brighton youth.

"Nonsense, man; he's much too big and heavy for you," cautioned the engineer.

"Leave that to me—I'm strong and well and he's all in. It's his only chance. Besides, he's my chum and I'd give my life for him if it was necessary."

That settled it. With the assistance of Smalley the eager young flagman who had strayed into the locomotive for more than one useful purpose on this momentous trip drew the inert form of Chick from the seat in the cab and lowered away over the side of the locomotive. Bob got down first and with his strong willing arms took Chick upon his back. Closer to the ground level of the tunnel the air was not so suffocating and there was less volume of smoke.

It was agreed between Bob and Smalley before parting that Bob would wait with his burden outside the tunnel until the train drew up and that Smalley would stop long enough to take on the pair again.

"Hurry, lad and good luck to you," called the engineer as he readjusted his gas mask and clambered back into the cab.

Stumbling along in the darkness and the smoke Bob found the burden almost too much to bear. But gritting his teeth and plugging along as best he could he soon commenced to make headway. Remembering an old trick that had been taught him in the gymnasium at Brighton he swung the form of his chum over his shoulders so that one arm clutched the knees and the other the head, well up on the shoulder. In this ungainly fashion Bob stumbled along the ties. Once his heavy shoe caught on a steel rail of the track and he nearly went down with his burden.

Presently the smoke cleared away sufficiently for the brave young flagman to see the mouth of the tunnel. To his great joy he perceived it was now but a scant hundred yards away. Redoubling his efforts he succeeded eventually in reaching the opening and in depositing the form of his chum on the greensward that sloped up from the track.

Resorting to artificial respiration Bob worked the arms of Wharton up and down

but had to give this up for fear of breaking open the wound in his chum's maimed forearm. In desperation Bob knelt over the prostrated body and listened for the telltale heart beat that would tell whether life still maintained in the bosom of his dear old friend.

Yes, Chick still breathed and, better yet, after an interval the eyes opened fitfully and closed. Again in a moment or two they opened and sought the face of the ministering youth.

"Wharton, old boy, you're still here: thank God for that," murmured Bob.

His chum smiled back for an instant, and then the eyelids fluttered shut again.

No. 17 was under way again and pulling for escape from the tunnel.

CHAPTER XV

“THE YANKS ARE COMING!”

IT took Jacques Fournier, the versatile Frenchman, only a few minutes to cut the wires after he had hurried forward through the tunnel and attach a telephone receiver. In war time the French railway crews were prepared for every emergency, and the means of communicating with headquarters in an emergency was not neglected in the general scheme of things. Soon he was in communication with the train despatcher at Amiens and calling for help.

“Send out aviators at once: we are bombarded by a bunch of Gothas,” was his urgent message.

Just as Fournier had predicted the German flyers had circled away from the train for a moment to avoid any artillery that might have been set up for protection of the tunnel. Now they were back again on the far side of the tunnel and waiting for their prey to come out into the open again.

“We’ll fool them this time,” chuckled

Fournier as he severed his telephone connection again and spliced the wires.

And very soon the expected happened. Out of the west, sweeping high in the sky like mere specks against the blue, came allied airplanes—a rescue detail eager of the opportunity to grapple with the Huns. Even while the crew of the supply train looked on a battle was staged before their eyes, and to their great joy they soon beheld the Germans turn tail and run for their own lines before a superior force.

Before closing the telephone connection Fournier had informed the telegrapher back at Romey of the situation in the tunnel with instructions to set all signals against the stalled train.

“I’ll take no chances on that fellow Schmidt,” muttered the Frenchman.

“What’s he been doing now?” ejaculated Smalley. The little engineer had stuck to his locomotive and, well-protected by his gas-mask, had been able to drive the engine ahead until it stood now just within the entrance of the tunnel.

Exasperated over the jamming of the anti-aircraft gun under mysterious circumstances Fournier told his engineer the story. He

could think of no other way that the gun could have been put out of commission except by some one who knew intimately of its presence in the middle of the train, and who either had boarded the train back at the watering station, or was on all the way from Amiens.

"Soon as we get back I'll report this all right," the big Frenchman growled.

Schmidt was now at the rear of the train, having been detailed by Fournier to go back with a danger flag to guard against any collision.

"Much good he'll do us," continued Fournier. "If I hadn't notified the station at Romey we'd stand a chance of having some fellow telescope our rear."

Fournier was infuriated and stoutly maintained he'd never go out again with Schmidt in his crew.

Chick had rallied a bit from his stupor and was able to sit up. But he was in a thoroughly weakened condition and quite unable to continue the job of firing No. 17. His arm was giving him pain and the gas of the tunnel had weakened him.

"You can count on me," volunteered Bob while Smalley and Fournier debated the best means of moving the train.

"What's that? Do you mean you can fire No. 17 the rest of the way? queried the Frenchman.

"I should say I can," answered the little Brighton quarterback.

"I'll say he can, too," countered Smalley, remembering Bob's plucky part in the escape from No Man's Land at Cambrai.

And so it was agreed. By a rapid calculation Fournier estimated the train was not more than fifteen kilometers from the big allied supply base where they were to deliver their train. It was decided to start forthwith. Accordingly, one of the freight cars was broken open and Wharton made as comfortable as possible among the piled up merchandise on its way to the boys in the trenches.

Soon the train was under way again with Bob Grier in the cab with engineer Smalley and Fournier guarding the rear of the train. The car in which Wharton was placed was but two coaches removed from the locomotive, and at intervals between firing the little French engine Bob made his way back and ministered to his wounded companion.

Without mishap the supply train made its way forward until finally there loomed

in the distance the outlines of the allied storeyard where supplies for the front line trenches were being delivered. It was in the heart of a woodland section with great munition dumps all around and storehouses for the supplies of the quartermasters' department.

"Great work," cried the colonel in command at the detraining point. "We've just heard of your plucky fight with the Hun birdmen back at Romey and were on the lookout for you."

And right well the allied armies needed the supplies. The German counter-offensive was well under way, with the result that the French and British forces had been forced back during the preceding three or four days, leaving behind them precious stores that had fallen into German hands. It was only too true: the Germans had recoiled under the impact of Byng's smash at Cambrai and, with concentrated forces, were again taking the initiative with all their might.

After a few hours' holdover the French railway crew prepared for the return run to Amiens. This time they would take only empty cars of a train that had been unloaded

during the night. Chick Wharton rallied readily to expert treatment under the care of Red Cross physicians and soon was smiling again with his injured hand in a sling.

"Only a scratch, chum; will be O. K. in a day or two," he laughed. But Chick was in no condition to continue his duties in the cab of No. 17. From the ranks of the fighting troops was recruited a poilu who had served for a time in the railway service, and he was assigned to the cab with Smalley.

The trip back was uneventful, being negotiated under cover of night. Soon the boys were gliding again into the yard at Amiens. It was near midnight when the train drew again into the yard it had left in the morning, but a familiar figure was waiting patiently to greet "his wards."

"You, Uncle Jim!" exclaimed Bob, as the yardmaster climbed up into the cabin. No sooner had the train stopped than Bennett, climbing into the engine, had learned from Smalley of the encounter with the German birdmen and of the injury to Wharton.

"How are you, my boy?" inquired the genial old Chesterton yardmaster as he turned from shaking hands with Bob to greet the

injured fireman. Chick was coiled on the cushioned seat.

"Fit as a fiddle except for a bit of a drill in the left hand," smiled Chick as he jumped up to greet his old friend.

And, indeed, except for the bandage and sling Wharton looked fresh and alert, notwithstanding all he had gone through. The boy made light of his injury and insisted he would soon be ready for service again.

"It will take more than this scratch to keep me out of it," declared the enthusiastic young railroader.

The Brighton boys were jubilant over their first trip to the front as bonafide railroaders and eager for more service. They told their guardian all about the events of the day, omitting no detail, especially the mysterious disabling of the gun that had been relied upon to protect them from air attacks.

"Very unusual, boys," remarked Bennett with a shake of the head, after Bob had told of the stormy scene between Fournier and Schmidt.

"And not the first time Al has been placed in an unfavorable light," suggested Chick.

"Not the first time that he denied the

imputation and asserted his innocence," countered Bob.

The trio were agreed that in the absence of actual first-hand evidence with which to confront Schmidt of disloyalty to the allied cause there were no grounds to proceed against him. They knew Fournier would make a complete statement of the whole affair at headquarters and awaited developments with interest.

"They'll look him up all right and get his record straight from headquarters," remarked Uncle Jim as the boys prepared to bid their old friend goodnight and turn in for a well-earned rest.

Events for the next few weeks moved rapidly. The allied armies, particularly General Rawlinson's division in the old Cambrai sector were being hurled back under the titanic blows dealt by the rejuvenated German forces. Supplies were going forward to the allied lines in endless procession and in seemingly endless quantity. The railroad forces were kept busy manning the arteries of travel.

For several weeks Chick Wharton was numbered among the "blessés" of the casualty station at Amiens, but mended rapidly

under expert care. The machine-gun bullet that had ripped through his left hand in the fight at Romey bridge had been a clean-cut wound and Chick's splendid physique built up by his athletic career at Brighton had stood him well. He was soon in good shape and back at work again.

And then, one spring morning, came news that thrilled the American boys to the heart. Bob and Chick had just reported for duty at the roundhouse in Amiens when Uncle Jim hurried up to them. He was all in smiles.

"Got a great surprise for you boys," he began. He was grinning from ear to ear like a boy with a new toy.

The two lads from Chesterton came up eagerly in response to his salutation.

"What's all the sunshine about this morning, Uncle Jim?" demanded Bob with an air of pleasantry.

The yard foreman was so happy he could scarce contain himself.

"Remember what I told you boys some time back about it not being long before American locomotives got over here **on the** job?" he began by way of introduction.

The boys nodded assent.

"Remember I said it would not be long

before we would be riding in Yankee rolling stock drawn by honest-to-goodness made-in-America locomotives and manned all over by Yankee crews?"

Sensing what was coming the two Brighton boys were grinning too by now.

"Go on—give us the news," broke in Chick eagerly.

Uncle Jim could scarce contain his delight.

"Well, its all true," he continued, "They're all here, and what's better yet, they're all set up and ready for business." And then the old Chesterton foreman gave them the glad news.

"While you and I and the rest of us have been pegging away here, the American forces have arrived in grand fashion. Great railroad yard set up below Brest on the coast. American shops and all. Special American engines and cars fitted to the French tracks made in the good old U. S. A. and transported all the way across the Atlantic. Not only here, I tell you, but set up and ready for business. What do you think of that?"

Uncle Jim was fairly bubbling over with delight.

"Gee, but I'm glad I'm a Yankee lad," chortled Chick as he did a buck and wing dance around his Brighton chum.

But Uncle Jim had even better news.

"Listen, lads," he continued. "The best is yet to come. The Yanks are pouring into France by the thousands. They've been coming in for weeks and are ready to take their places in the front line trenches.

The demonstration that followed was more like one of the scenes attendant upon a football celebration at Brighton. Bob and Chick hugged each other out of sheer delight.

"Now for the Hindenburg line and on to Berlin!" they chorused while the emotional Uncle Jim hammered a clenched fist against a receptive palm.

There was still more important news, however.

"I've saved the best for the last, though," said Bennett with a chuckle.

"Spill it quick!" demanded the boys almost in unison.

"Keep this to yourselves, but we are to be transferred to the coast in a few days and put in with the all-American railway contingent," whispered the yard foreman.

"Hooray!" yelled Bob.

"Lead me to it!" followed Wharton.

It was almost as good as getting back home again!

CHAPTER XVI

ABOARD THE TROOP TRAIN

IT was a gala day in the camp of the U. S. railway forces at Brest when the first American locomotive was set up under the expert direction of shopmen who had come all the way from Pennsylvania and Schenectady, New York, to help the Allies in solving the immense transportation problem.

This new special locomotive that had come from America was a beautiful steel and iron monster weighing 166,500 pounds. She was painted battleship gray to make her inconspicuous. From either side of her tender, and from the glass plates of her headlight gleamed the magical words: "U. S. A. No. 1." To the assembled trainmen who stood watching the finishing touches being placed upon "the old girl"—as a Burlington engineer termed her—it was like coming up with a long lost friend.

With this first locomotive had come the first American cars, only thirty-six feet long

in order to round the short French curves, but much larger than the French rolling stock. And it had been announced that this "No. 1" was but the first of a consignment of 680 special engines that had either arrived or were on the way, while the few cars at hand were the first of a lot of 6000 cars that Uncle Sam had arranged to ship across the Atlantic!

"Three cheers for the good old Yank choo-choo!" essayed a brawny Ohioan, who before coming to France had driven a huge eight-wheeler on the Big Four from Cleveland to Cincinnati.

They were given with a will. Pouring fuel on the fire of enthusiasm a mechanic on the running board of "No. 1" grabbed the bell rope and yanked it furiously. It was welcome music to the many Yankees far from home—the first time in many days they had heard the familiar toll of an American locomotive bell.

Men slapped each other's backs and jumped for joy, as the bell clanged furiously and sonorously.

"Shut my eyes and I'm back there on the New York Central somewhere between Rochester and Buffalo," snorted a buck

private whose face was smeared from ear to ear with jet black grease.

The ringing of the bell was accompanied by other strange phenomena. At the first staccato clang a number of French trackmen working near-by threw down their tools and began frantically adjusting their gas masks. The Americans gazed on in wonderment.

"What's this—a dress rehearsal for our benefit?" drawled a West Virginian who had "held the reins" over a Baltimore & Ohio mountain climber.

In a moment, however, the Americans were convulsed with laughter.

"They think it's a gas attack!" said Colonel Lee, in charge of the setting-up crew. And then he explained that since the beginning of the war all French locomotives had been robbed of their bells, and the latter, set up, as danger signals, used only to announce gas attacks!

"It's the first one on a locomotive they've heard for a long time," laughed the Colonel as he sent an orderly to dispel the fears of the over-wrought Frenchmen.

Bob Grier and Chick Wharton, together with Captain Bennett, their old friend from

Chesterton, and Joe Smalley, the brave young corporal whom they had found since coming to France, and who had helped them escape from No Man's Land at Cambrai, were a part of the group who were spectators at the "unveiling" of the first American locomotive in France. Relieved from duty at Amiens after laboring for several months in aid of the French railway system, they now were stationed in the big American yard at Brest helping in the general activity attendant upon getting the first all-American railway system working in France.

"Almost as good as meeting an old friend right from home," grinned Uncle Jim with a fond look of admiration for "U. S. A. No. 1."

"And they can't turn us loose any too soon on one of those boys," was Joe Smalley's rejoinder.

"Righto," chorused the two Brighton boys who felt by now as sophisticated in the business of railroading as the most hardened veteran in the camp. And quite properly, too, since they had been in actual service for months and under the fire of the enemy upon a number of occasions.

Chick Wharton had fully recovered from

the wound sustained in the attack near the village of Romey, but it was evident he no longer was physically fit to continue in the capacity of a fireman. Although the wound in his hand had completely healed there remained a stiffness as a result of the muscles and tendons having been torn by the fire of the machine gun that quite precluded his chances of handling a scoop shovel in firing a locomotive. Besides, the newly arrived American locomotives were three or four times the size of the small French locomotives, requiring the care of a seasoned fireboy, and very arduous labor.

"Never mind, son," Uncle Jim had counselled one morning after announcing to Chick that he would have to be transferred from the cab of the locomotive, "you will have a chance to serve in some other capacity."

"But, I want to stay with Bob, and—"

"We'll attend to that," concluded Captain Bennett consolingly.

And, sure enough, the boy's troubled mind was set at rest only too soon. One morning, shortly after the above conversation, the veteran yardmaster hailed the two Brighton chums in the railway camp with a beckoning finger.

"Good news for you, boys," he announced. "For his valor under fire and ready performance of duty, private Robert Grier has been raised to the rank of sergeant, and along with his commission as a non-com comes the order to place him as a conductor on one of the new all-American trains."

"Hoo-ray for you, Bob," sang out Chick in high glee.

But Uncle Jim wasn't through yet.

"And private Charles Wharton, for his courage and tenacity in sticking to the little French locomotive at Romey while injured is to receive the Distinguished Service Order. He—"

Bob was pounding Chick between the shoulders.

"He is to receive the decoration directly from Major-General Atterbury within the next few days when the General arrives from Paris."

Captain Bennett went to explain, further, that because of his experience, his knowledge of the country and, furthermore, his desire to continue in service even though he might have been invalided home with a wound stripe, Wharton was to remain with his old chum.

"I've got you an assignment to the same crew with Bob Grier," added their captain. "You will be flagman under conductor Grier," addressing Wharton.

The boys were overjoyed.

"Who will be the third man in our caboose—our brakeman?" broke in Bob.

"Why your old friend Al Schmidt," replied Bennett evenly.

"What—"

"Yes, they sifted out his case pretty thoroughly and could find nothing on him. He was tried before a court of inquiry and found not guilty. You remember, they quizzed you boys over at Amiens, but no one, not even Jacques Fournier, could show any evidence that Schmidt had anything to do with crippling that gun mount. He's back in the service and he is to be with you boys again. Orders are orders, that's all I know about it."

"But, Uncle Jim, I'm almost sure that—"

"Never mind, son, they're pretty careful, you know, and wouldn't take chances if they thought they had a spy in camp. Just keep your eyes and ears open all the time."

"You can count on us doing that," the boys agreed almost in the same words.

Things moved lively for the next few days. Crews were being made up and preparations under way to get the American line in operation as quickly as possible. American troops were arriving in large numbers. Regiments that had arrived in England and undergone intensive training there were being hurried into France. Still other fresher arrivals were debarking directly on French soil and drilling hurriedly for service at the front. The German counter-attack at Cambrai had not only developed a big movement that had driven a wedge in the English lines almost to the gates of Amiens, but further south had widened into a massive forward movement led by the troops of the Crown Prince from the sector north of Soissons eastward to the Verdun front.

What was needed now was Yankee troops in goodly numbers, and, even more, Yankee trains to move the new arrivals forward to the succor of the hard-pressed French, English and their various allies. The American-controlled road now was in operation. One by one the various crews were taken over the line to acquaint them with its every detail. Time-tables, routes of travel, stations, sidings, watering places—every

essential phase of the work was taken up so that when the time came there could be no fatal slip-up of any kind.

"Here you go, boys," shouted Uncle Jim one morning in May as he came into the mess hall when Bob and Chick were finishing up good old American ham and eggs, fried potatoes and coffee with real cream from a near-by French dairy. "Your first American trip."

The boys jumped up to salute their captain.

"Eleven-thirty for you chaps: report at ten o'clock. I hope you² are both feeling in fine trim, for this first assignment is very much worth while. No supplies this time."

And, then, in an aside, behind his hand:

"Troop-train carrying good old Yanks from the States!"

Bob and Chick were elated not only over the fact that the American troops were going up to the front to stem the big German drive but more so because they were to have an important part in getting them to the front and so lost no time in getting ready for the trip.

Reporting in the freight yard they found their train made up—ten American cars that were to carry artillery detachments.

Three of the cars were flat ones to accommodate the cars, two gondolas for supplies and equipment and five box cars into which the artillerymen were to be loaded. Captain Bennett was making up a second train of twelve cars and informed the lads that their train was to go forward in two sections running closely together.

"You are going all the way to Gievray," he informed the boys, "where your troops will leave the train and go forward overland to their place at the battle front. I understand these boys are going in at a little French town known as Cantigny."

The Brighton boys had made Cantigny one day during that earlier period when they had been engaged in construction work and pictured it at once as a charming French village that had borne marks of the Hun's first unsuccessful drive on Paris.

In their caboose, No. 17, the boys found Schmidt already awaiting them.

"How are you men; haven't seen you in a long time," was the brakeman's salutation as Bob and Chick clambered aboard and stowed away their mess kits.

"Glad to see you again, Al," replied Bob as he grasped the extended palm and looked

full into the face of the man who had figured in several questionable episodes.

The greeting was so warm as to disarm all suspicions, and the boys were inclined to figure that perhaps after all Schmidt had been darker painted than he deserved. Schmidt was a quiet, morose type but when he felt in humor could be very companionable. On this day of their reunion he seemed in a happy frame of mind.

"I hope you fellows don't cherish any doubts as to my loyalty as a result of that affair over at Amiens a couple of months ago," the black-haired brakeman ventured after an awkward pause.

"Not at all, old man," replied Wharton as he shook hands. "It was funny how that gun was put out of commission so mysteriously, but I guess that's a mystery that never will be solved."

Schmidt turned to polishing the "windows" of his gas mask.

"Some crafty Hun that none of us saw, I guess," mumbled the brakeman as he bent over his mask.

The conversation was interrupted by the clang of a locomotive bell, and the trio looked up to see their engine backing up ready for a coupling.

CHAPTER XVII

FLAGGING THE SECOND SECTION

U. S. A. NO. 4," was the particular locomotive, and the engineer hanging out the cab window none other than Joe Smalley. In the rearrangement of the crew growing out of the transfer from French to American service, Jacques Fournier had dropped out of the crew. His place now was held by Bob Grier, who had climbed from brakeman to conductor, while Chick Wharton had moved from the position of fireman in the locomotive to flagman in the caboose. The new fireman was Terry Hanlon, a rugged and stalwart person of Irish extraction who had gained his railroad experience on the Lehigh Valley running out of Jersey City into the heart of the Pennsylvania anthracite coal fields at Scranton. Terry had a brawny fist that closed over your extended palm like a vise.

"Glad to meet yez, fellows," was his greeting as he climbed down out of his perch in the cab and drawing off a heavy gauntlet

glove shook hands with the members of the train crew.

Terry was in great glee over his appointment to one of the new American locomotives and proud of his new "iron horse."

"Look at that girl, would yez!" he chuckled indicating the gray monster of iron and steel with a sweep of his hand. "There's no stopping this bird, begorra, until she rides right over the Kaiser and lands us plump in the city of Berlin."

Terry insisted on showing the boys the fine points of No. 4; the great driving wheels with their massive connecting rods; the huge cylinders and the broadly-arched boiler with its low set smokestack and trim little headlight. Terry had the huge brass bell polished until it reflected the morning sun with a dazzling brilliance. He insisted that they climb into the cab and inspect his quarters.

"Look at the mouth on her," he exclaimed, yanking open the fire door and disclosing the seething furnace of livid coal lava within.

"Some appetite, this girl has," he rattled on glibly. "But leave it to old Terry to keep her popping with steam all the way."

Joe Smalley, too, was rather pleased over

the transition to a genuine American cab again, and affectionately patted the brass air brake as he turned to greet the train crew.

"Now we can go some, boys," was his bantering remark as he threw on the injector, permitting water to surge from the tank into the boiler of the big engine.

In a few minutes the engine had coupled up its caboose and was drifting down into the yard where it was to pick up its train. Once under way it was but a short run to the military camp where the First Battalion of the 110th Field Artillery was to entrain. In a few minutes conductor Grier was busy with army officers superintending the loading of the artillery. The American troopers were singing and joking happily over the prospect of early action at the front and gave the American railway crew a glad hand. The regiment had been undergoing instruction in a French artillery school at Havre for six weeks and were eager now to get out on the firing line.

"Let's go, fellows," cried a lusty doughboy as he bent his shoulder to the bumper of the caboose and pretended to push the train off to a start.

"That's us," laughed another as he swung

his arm up and down after the manner of a conductor signalling his engineer to "pull her open."

It took some time to load the artillery pieces and fasten them down so they would not be jarred out of position while the train was in motion. Consequently, it was well on toward two o'clock before the train pulled out of the camp. Conductor Grier had his orders from the train despatcher's office, with a carbon copy also for engineer Smalley, and they gave the train the right of way into Gievray over all westbound traffic. Finally the train got under way, with all the remaining doughboys in camp cheering a lusty farewell to their departing comrades.

"Here's to a safe journey all the way, Chick," remarked Bob as he swung up on the rear platform of the caboose with his old chum.

"And good luck for these dandy chaps we are delivering to Marshall Foch and General Pershing," countered Wharton in serious mien.

Caboose No. 17 lacked nothing to comfort the American railroader. Her constructors had seen to it that nothing was left undone

to make as comfortable as possible the daily life of the men who composed her crew. Long upholstered seats afforded a place to stretch out and rest a bit as opportunity afforded. In one end of the cabin was an iron range on which food could be cooked. There were lockers for clothing and equipment and in another corner an ice cooler with fresh drinking water.

"Almost like being back home in the yard at Chesterton," remarked Bob as he surveyed his new quarters admiringly.

"And very nearly as comfortable as our old bunk room in the dormitories at Brighton," added Chick with a broad grin.

The boys were in a happy frame of mind. The train was dancing merrily along and the doughboys ahead regaling themselves with snatches of song. Schmidt had swung ahead "to greet an old acquaintance he had spotted in one of the gun crews."

"How about a little snack?" remarked Wharton, realizing it was now long past the noon hour, and they had been so busy loading the artillerymen they had forgotten all about such an important thing as food.

Conductor Grier readily acquiesced and in a few minutes the two trainmen had a

pot of coffee boiling and a pan of ham and fried potatoes sizzling over the fire.

"Great!" sighed Bob as he smacked his lips over the hastily improvised meal.

Through the afternoon the train glided along without incident of any kind, stopping once for water in a French manufacturing town where the natives gave the American troops a hearty welcome and passed aboard what food treasures they had to offer. The new all-American line had but recently been opened and the two trainmen gazed with justifiable pride on the long steel trail stretching away behind them under the steady click-click of the speeding wheels.

"Folks at home will be proud when they hear what their engineers have done over here," remarked Wharton.

It had been a stupendous undertaking, this construction of a new railway line in a comparatively brief space of time, and the Chesterton boys marveled at the ingenuity of the master minds that had conceived the solution of the perplexing transportation problem, and the indefatigable energy of the construction crews that had laid it down. What James J. Hill, the pioneer railroad king of America, had done in months while span-

ning "the Great Divide" had in this new century of progress been accomplished in weeks instead.

By nightfall three quarters of the journey up to Gievray had been accomplished. Flashing into another picturesque French village the train stopped only long enough to have orders handed aboard from a signal-tower where an American telegrapher sat manipulating the keys of instruments that bore the Made-in-America stamp.

"Clear block all the way into Gievray," shouted conductor Grier as he swung up alongside his flagman and showed his flimsy order sheet to Wharton.

"Not a train on the road from here up," he added as he took a turn at the water cooler.

Night had closed down and Wharton, whose duties kept him close to the rear of the train, where he was expected to protect it in the event of an unexpected stop, had the red signal lamps swung from the rear of the cabin.

"I'll just swing up front a bit and see how the boys in the front end are making out," sang out Bob as he returned for a moment to the rear platform and accosted his old chum.

"Go ahead, old boy: you can count on me to stand by here," answered Wharton.

"It looks like easy sailing from here in," continued Bob, "and I feel like stretching my legs a bit and seeing how our good friends of the artillery are enjoying themselves."

Left alone Chick climbed into the cupola and settled himself into the "bridge" of the caboose where from its open windows, front and side, he had a commanding view of the country.

His mind wandered back over the last few months into which so much activity had been crowded and he found himself for the moment contemplating home scenes back in Chesterton and the little school at Winchester that he had left when the call of duty and love of country beckoned him across the waters to these new scenes of activity.

"Good old Brighton!" he soliloquized to himself, half aloud.

It was a balmy spring night and the snatches of melody from the cars ahead floated back to him, audible above the rumble of the speeding train.

"In another day or two those boys will be out front on the firing line standing by their

guns," he mused, and then pictured to himself the life in No Man's Land as he and Bob had found it at Cambrai where they were caught under the German barrage and all but lost in a harrowing experience.

At intervals in his reveries Chick had flashes from the front end of the train that reminded him of the relentless activities of Terry Hanlon, the fireboy. Every time the door of the firebox was swung open to admit fuel the sky for a space around was illuminated by the red glare of the roaring furnace.

"Attaboy, Terry!" Chick would sing out, remembering how he, too, but recently had performed in a like capacity.

Wharton was humming to himself the refrain of an old Brighton song when all at once he was flung from his seat in the cupola and hurled against the window frame in front of him with such force that for a minute he thought every rib in his chest had been cracked. If a pugilist had landed a stiff uppercut in his mid-section the effect could have been no more startling or more painful. He gasped for an instant and then winced with pain as the air surged again into his lungs.

Then it dawned on him that the train

had stopped short as though an unseen hand had suddenly reached up between the rails and grasped it. What was the trouble?

With an effort he climbed down out of the cupola rubbing his left side and glad to note that to all intents he had suffered no serious injury from the unexpected blow other than that temporarily the "wind had been knocked out of his sails."

"Wonder what's the matter now?" he pondered, unable to explain the sudden stoppage of the train. Something had gone wrong at the front end; maybe an obstruction had loomed up on the track ahead and Smalley had jammed on the emergency brakes. And then there flashed through his mind what was expected of him.

"The second section not far behind us!" he ejaculated.

Quick as a flash Chick remembered that the artillery regiment had been loaded in two sections, and that the second section was running twenty minutes behind the first section all the way into Gievray.

His part was clear now. Jumping to the rear platform he snatched up his red signal lantern and striking a match applied it to the sputtering wick. As the light flared

up he clamped the oil container back in the globe and snapped the catch. With a leap he was down out of the caboose and scurrying up the track without waiting to learn anything of what had happened up front.

"I've got to stop that second section or there will be a smash-up here and the death of some of these doughboys," was the thought that ran through his mind.

Taking the middle of the track Chick sped along into the night listening intently for the rumble that would indicate the approach of the second section. He knew full well that this train, like the first section, had been given a clear block only a few miles back and would come bowling along at thirty-five miles an hour or better.

Half a mile, at least, he knew he must go in order to insure giving a signal that would enable the engineer to bring his train to a full stop before it would crash into the rear of the stalled first section.

Gritting his teeth and clasping the lantern tightly the young flagman leaped along the track two ties at a stride.

He had proceeded for not more than five minutes when there came to his ears the rumble of the approaching train!

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WRECK AVERTED

WHARTON'S all-consuming desire by now was to put as much ground between the stalled first section and the oncoming second section as possible before the headlight of the approaching locomotive showed in sight. Well he knew that every foot on the way counted for with the troop train speeding along at thirty or forty miles an hour the engineer would not be able to stop on short notice even though he jammed on the emergency air brakes.

"I've got to stop that train!" was his audible cry as he clasped the red-shaded lantern tight and hurled himself forward in his best stride.

Plainly now through the still night air of the quiet French countryside he could hear the roar of the approaching train; the rhythmic turn of the American locomotive's giant connecting rods and the steady throb of her exhaust. Before his mind loomed the picture of the brave doughboys lolling in the train

in perfect ignorance of their danger. Suppose their train ploughed into the rear of the first section? Wreck—ruin—death and suffering!

Speeding along suddenly he was aware of the fact that he was running into a deep cut. The railroad at this point was cut through the gentle slope of a receding hill-side with huge boulders stretching their ragged edges toward the roadbed from either side. The track curved sharply in a broad sweeping turn. Now he realized he must exert his every effort to make that danger signal seen by the engineer in the cab. The job was made more difficult by reason of the fact that the engineer would not see the red light until directly on top of it.

As he ran on, his pace never slackening, he began swinging the lantern to and fro across the track realizing the train was almost upon him and would come flashing around the curve at any moment. But just then a most unfortunate thing occurred.

In his exertions Chick swung the lantern too close to his body. Thrown momentarily off balance when he tramped on a huge chunk of coal the young flagman accidentally dashed the signal lamp against his right knee. The impact nearly wrenched it free

of his hand and as he lurched forward to clasp it tight again he stepped into a slight depression of the track, his heel catching on the off side of the tie and his toes projecting down into a hole.

Another instant he pitched forward in the darkness unable to keep his feet and was flung headlong on the roadbed directly between the ties. Down he went in a heap. The lantern was dashed directly against the off rail of the track with such violence that the globe was smashed in a twinkling. Worse yet, the tiny flame, sputtering just for an instant in the night air, faded away and then was extinguished altogether.

Just at that moment the rays of the headlight on the approaching troop-train locomotive flashed along the rails.

An exclamation of dismay escaped the flagman's lips. The fates seemed against him. What now was to prevent the train speeding by into the night—and, without any warning signal, into the rear of the stalled first section?

Nimble the youth sprang to his feet, glad to find that he had escaped injury. A sprained ankle or an incapacity of any kind would have meant sure death under the

grinding wheels of the hurrying train. But now he was safe and could leap aside to escape the grinding wheels of the iron monster.

But Chick Wharton was thinking of more than personal safety. As he scrambled to his feet he lurched forward and grabbed the partly demolished lantern. In his mind lingered a faint hope that there yet remained time to light the extinguished signal lamp. As he leaped from the track and started to scramble up the steep side of the jagged cut he felt in his pockets for matches. Even with the red globe smashed into a thousand pieces he figured a dim flickering light, even though it burn for a few seconds, might attract the eye of the engineer.

But it was too late for this. With a roar and a blaze of blinding light the locomotive swept down upon the affrighted brakeman as he stood vainly searching for a match. Now it seemed that all was lost; only a block signal set automatically could slow up the train and prevent it hurling itself at full speed into the standing train ahead.

Chick Wharton, born and raised in a railroad town, resourceful and quick-witted, had but one thing left to do. That he resolved

upon the moment he saw it would be impossible to flash a warning signal from his battered lantern. Taking his position firmly in the shale and loose earth where he stood he gripped the lantern in his right hand and then, just as the locomotive drew abreast him hurled it with all his might directly at the window of the cab where he knew the engineer sat crouched with his hand on the throttle.

It was a desperate chance. The engineer at his post might be struck down by the flying missile and possibly seriously wounded. But what was the life of one man against the hundreds of American soldiers who were his passengers on this trip to the battlefield?

"My only chance!" gasped Wharton as he cast the lantern full and free into space.

His aim was good. Above the roar of the train could be heard the splintering of broken glass. The chance shot had gone home—the lantern had crashed through the cab window of the engine. And that was exactly what Chick Wharton had wanted it to do. As he resolved on the move he had figured that the engineer and fireman, shocked by such a bombardment and finding a railroad lantern had been hurled in upon them, would take warning and conclude that something was wrong.

The Brighton boy's intuitions were correct. Andy Bassett, engineer of the second section, the glass beside him suddenly shattered and his cap flicked from his head by a flying missile, turned to see a railroad lantern clattering down over the end of the boiler. As it fell before the half open fire door and he saw its outlines strongly revealed, he closed the throttle with a quick motion of his left arm and grasping the air brake control threw on the emergency full force.

The whistle of the compressed air and the grinding of the brakes on the wheels—grinding until the sparks flew—were sweet sounds to the forlorn brakeman of the first section as he stood transfixed in the deep cut of the railroad with the troop-filled cars flitting by. With a cry of joy he began to move forward toward the front end of the train taking care not to get too close to the still moving cars.

The sharp staccato notes of the locomotive whistle, combined with the jar that accompanied the sudden slacking of the train and the application of the brakes created consternation among the doughboys clustered within the cars. Doors were thrown open, anxious faces appeared and all seemed straining to find the meaning of the sudden stop-

page. A jangle of voices resounded above the din of the train.

"What's wrong?" . . . "Where are the boches?" . . . "Did we hit anything" . . . these, and similar cries were heard.

Unmindful of the confusion Chick hurried forward along the cars until he came up close to the engine. In the dim light he could discern the shadowy figures of trainmen who had dropped from the locomotive. One, carrying a lantern, was hurrying back along the train, a huge revolver clasped in the other hand as though anticipating an attack.

"Thank God, you stopped!" was all that Chick could stammer, the words choking in his throat as he beheld his wildest hopes realized.

"What's the matter here?" came the cry from the trainman. And then Chick, in eager phrases, explained the sudden stoppage of the first section, his own race to flag the second section and the smashing of his lantern. By now the engineer and the conductor had joined the group and they listened intently to Chick's story.

"Well, you saved us that time, my young friend," cried Andy Bassett, the engineer. "I'd probably have gotten the red on the

next block signal, but no telling whether I could have stopped in time considering the time we were making. We were running on the green, but supposed you fellows were all O. K. ahead, and so we were coming right along."

"Bully for you, young fellow," put in Jake Bowen, the conductor of the second section. "You not only saved us but all these dandy doughboys back there. Put 'er there."

Suiting actions to words the conductor grasped Chick's hand and wrung it warmly. Other members of the crew followed suit, realizing what a close shave they had had and how Wharton's timely shot with the battered lantern had saved them.

"But see here, chappie," interrupted engineer Bassett. "You well nigh ruined me. That lantern of yours just grazed my head. Half an inch closer and I'd have gone to sleep. However, I guess I'd have not minded so long as you stopped us. Shake," he broke off suddenly, nearly crushing Chick's fingers with his brawny mit.

By now doughboys had swarmed up front to inquire the reason for the sudden stop—scores of them. When they heard of what had happened and how Wharton had pre-

vented a wreck by his timely act they crowded about the modest youth, praising him for his quick wit and expressing their hearty thanks.

"Three cheers for flagman Wharton," cried an exultant voice. And they were given with a will.

But Wharton was thinking of his own train ahead and wondering what had happened. Detaching himself from the group of artillerymen he started forward in company with conductor Bowen eager to learn what had stopped the first section and so nearly precipitated a rear-end collision. They had not gone more than a hundred and fifty yards until they ran into conductor Grier.

"Thank heaven you got them stopped in time!" exclaimed Bob as he hurried forward to meet his old chum.

"And just in the nick of time," added conductor Bowen.

It took only a minute to explain the situation. Running along smoothly at forty miles an hour the first section had suddenly been parted midway between engine and caboose.

"Draw-head must have pulled out," explained Grier. "All we know is air-hose

suddenly parted. Lucky we didn't buckle up and spill a couple of cars loaded with doughboys into the ditch. As it is, we are all right again. Coupled up and ready to go. No damage done but a pretty tight squeak at that."

"Well, I'm glad of that and happier still we haven't a pile-up here," remarked Bowen.

And then Bob heard from the lips of the second section trainmen how Chick had resorted to a wily strategy to stop the flying troop train and how his quick initiative had virtually averted a wreck.

"Good for you, Chick; you surely used your head—and your good right arm that time," was Bob's rejoinder clasping the hand of his old chum.

Four long blasts from the locomotive of the first section interrupted the colloquy. It was the signal recalling the flagman. Joe Smalley, in the cab of No. 4, his train ready to move again, was eager to be off, but entirely in ignorance of the drama that had been enacted at the rear of the train.

With a few words of farewell Bob and Chick broke away from the trainmen of the second section and set out for their own caboose.

The trainmen of the first section broke into a dog trot knowing their train would soon be under way again. After a three minute sprint they drew themselves up again on the caboose and from the top of the cabin Bob signalled his engineer to "let her go."

"How do you suppose we broke in two so strangely?" queried Chick as Bob lowered again into the cabin and sprawled out on the cushioned seat.

"Well, it can happen any time, you know," said Bob. "Easiest thing to pull a drawhead. Just hard luck, I guess."

"Somebody could slip a coupling out purposely, couldn't they?" asked Chick persistently.

"I suppose they could—certainly they could if they were so evilly inclined," replied the young conductor.

"You don't suppose some one did that very thing—Schmidt, for instance?"

"Doggone it, there you go—that same old enigma again."

Just then Schmidt edged in through the doorway of the cabin, reporting the parted coupling holding true again without any sign of a breakage.

CHAPTER XIX

TAKING OUT THE "MUNITION SPECIAL"

HERE'S where we go some, chum!" sang out Bob as he roused his pal from sound sleep several mornings after the stirring ride into Gievray with the doughboys and their American artillery equipment—a trip that had nearly ended in disaster with a rear-end collision between the two sections of the special.

"What's up?" exclaimed Chick as he sat up quickly on the side of his bunk and rubbed his eyes to get rid of the "cobwebs" of sleep.

"Called to take up a special ammunition train—doughboys over at Cantigny need it badly—fast freight with right of way all the way into Gievray," answered Bob. "Call-boy just said we were to take out a special, but I ran into Uncle Jim Bennett outside the barracks here and he gave me the real tip."

"Fine stuff," was Chick's rejoinder as he

hustled into his clothes. "I'm feeling fine this morning and ready for anything."

Getting out into the yard the boys found what Uncle Jim had told them to be a fact. Shells, two score carloads of them, consigned to the front line trenches around Cantigny, to which American troops had but lately been assigned, formed the fast freight the Chesterton crew was to take out. Captain Bennett was superintending the final arrangement of the train.

"Morning, boys," he called out as the young trainmen approached. "You are the speed-boys today, all right. This stuff goes right through in a big jiffy and it's up to you fellows to deliver the goods. Uncle Sam is ready to begin smashing the Hun in earnest and is very much in need of these pills for his heavies. Good luck to you!"

Inspection of the train showed that for the greater part it was made up of gondolas on which the huge shells had been ranged in long rows. Here and there were several clusters of box cars and the labels upon them clearly indicated they were filled with high explosives. The familiar little caboose that had by now become the permanent "rolling home" of the two Brighton recruits had been

shunted into position at the rear of the train and it needed only the arrival of the locomotive to complete the make-up of the special.

"Handle me with care, Bill," Chick began singing, recalling an old song that seemed truly apropos considering the make-up of the train.

"Safety first, last and all the way," laughed Bob in turn. "Not only must we keep our powder dry, but also from getting hot."

Two inspectors were going over the cars making sure that every safety precaution was taken and that there were no "hot boxes" on the axles of the big steel cars, either to slow up the train or contribute to a possible explosion.

In a few minutes No. 4 came floating down through the yard, puffing filmy white from her stack and announcing her coming by the steady clamor of her brass bell. Al Schmidt was hanging on the rear step of the tender ready to leap off and throw the switch that would permit the engine to back in against her train.

"How are you, fellows," he beckoned cheerily as the locomotive glided past the caboose and continued on to the front of the train.

Bob waited until the locomotive was a dozen car lengths away and then turned on his chum.

"So help me, I'm going to watch that fellow every minute of the time going up today," the young conductor ejaculated with some show of agitation.

"You suspect him then, do you?" asked Chick with concern.

"Suspect him, of course I do," was the reply. "I've never trusted him since that night back home when he was called to the office to be quizzed about that wreck of No. 87 just in off the Upland Valley. You remember?"

Wharton nodded affirmatively.

"Seems to me he has been in a shady position on a number of occasions. First that airplane gun that was put out of commission, and then our trip the other day when the first section parted so queerly."

"Do you think he had anything to do with that?" put in Wharton excitedly

"Well, as I've said several times," answered Bob, "we've never been able actually to catch him with the goods, and it's hard to get a fellow on circumstantial evidence, especially when he's as careful as a Hun

agent would be under the circumstances. But he'll bear watching according to my notion."

"You think, then, he pulled a coupling on our special the other day, hoping to ditch the train if she buckled up short, and possibly kill a lot of our doughboys?" persisted Wharton.

"Such a thing could be done, you know," was the conductor's reply.

Wharton didn't relish the thought, and his face smirked in scorn as he contemplated a foe who would stoop to such devilish tricks.

"There's been a number of funny things happened since our engineers landed over here, come to think of it," recalled Bob as he sketched briefly several mysterious wrecks that had been reported from time to time, the burning of several supply depots and the disabling of equipment under peculiar circumstances.

"Lets be on our guard, chum, and see that nothing or nobody gets us," concluded the conductor as he turned away to get his final orders before giving Joe Smalley the "go" with the special munition train.

"You bet we will," his flagman countered.

A few minutes after six o'clock the train got under way. The orders handed engineer Smalley and conductor Grier called for a clear block all the way. A troop train had gone up around 3 o'clock in the morning but had progressed so steadily there was no likelihood of the munition train running close to her in a block. Half a dozen stalwart infantrymen had been assigned to the train and were detailed off six or eight car lengths apart with orders to keep a smart lookout for any mysterious forces that might be seeking the destruction of the train.

Gathering speed with each mile the special munition express was soon wheeling it along through the open French country at thirty miles an hour. Conductor Grier, intent upon safeguarding his freight, had decided to make trips back and forth over the cars every hour in company with sergeant Finneran who was in charge of the infantry detail aboard. In this way Bob hoped to keep an eye out for any treachery.

Chick Wharton, flagman, found himself most of the time lone guardian of the rear end.

It was a wonderful day, the sun shining brightly and the whole French countryside, that still bore the marks of the Hun, gleaming

resplendently in its brave efforts to smile in the face of the impending new German drive. Speeding past a picturesque old farm house, Chick waved a greeting to a petite young girl working in a field with a bent old woman.

"Not for long, France; you will soon be succored by the Yanks," soliloquized Wharton, contemplating the plight of devastated France that had stood up courageously through four long years of warfare and barbarity.

Of a sudden a whiff of smoke flittered by. It bore the odor of burning wood as though a fire had been freshly kindled. From his perch in the cupola Chick gazed down into the heart of the caboose, thinking for the moment a fire might have been started by coals from the crew's cooking range. But there was no evidence of fire anywhere.

"Guess I must have been dreaming," he muttered to himself. Bob was somewhere out on the train and Schmidt undoubtedly was up in the cab with the engine crew, where he invariably rode when his services were not required at the rear end.

Again in his comfortable post in the cupola Chick lounged in the window seat drinking in

the scenery and the fresh morning air. But again came the smell of smoke—this time a keen whiff holding more of the wood odor than the first suggestion.

“What in the world is that?” the young flagman questioned, now thoroughly aroused. A premonition of some hidden danger flitted through his mind. For a moment he let his eye travel along the side of the road bed thinking perhaps some old ties or scrapped building materials had been set afire by construction clean-up crews. But there was no trace of any such fires.

The young flagman, still perplexed, was about to crawl down from his position and climb to the top of the nearest box car for a survey of the train when he chanced to look forward along the side of the careening munition train. Just at that instant the train hit a sharp curve and swerved sharply to the right.

It was enough to give him a clear view of something that made his eyes bulge. Seven or eight car lengths ahead down between two of the huge box cars loaded with high explosives, he beheld a thin column of smoke issuing upward from somewhere near the base of the farthest car, and almost

directly over the couplings. As the cars veered even sharper with the bend of the curve the spring breeze blowing between the two cars wafted the smoke sharply to one side.

In that instant Chick saw a thin tongue of red flame shooting up the side of the car!

For a moment the flagman was too stunned by the sight to move. Just then the train straightened out again shutting the view of the flame from his eyes.

With the leap of a young tiger the youth was down from the cupola deliberating what to do but realizing something must be done promptly to prevent a serious catastrophe. As he flung himself from the ladder that led to the loft of the caboose he ran full into one of the Yankee infantrymen who had been detailed to the train.

"Quick, buddie; there's fire ahead on one of the high explosives," was all he could exclaim.

Instinctively the flagman grabbed from the wall of the caboose the fire extinguisher with which the car had been provided for just such emergencies as these. Slinging it over his shoulder he bolted through the door of the caboose calling upon the dough-boy to follow him.

Springing up the side of the gondola hitched next to the caboose Chick let himself down among the shells. The going was not easy for it was not an easy task to make progress over the munitions. But here was a situation that demanded immediate attention and Wharton's one thought was to get at the flaming box car as quickly as possible.

After a time he cleared the string of gondolas that intervened between the caboose and the box cars and sprang up the side of the nearest high explosive carrier. A veritable volcano if the flames ever touched the contents of the car!

Running lightly over the swerving platform of the car tops Chick looked up for an instant and beheld two other figures closing in on the specter of smoke from the front end of the train. One glance convinced him that it was Bob in the lead, closely followed by one of the train's special army guard.

With a flying leap Wharton cleared the open space that separated him from the car whose furthest end yawned directly over the wisps of mysterious smoke. A half dozen steps and he was gazing down between the two cars, straining through the smoke

for a view of the flames. A familiar voice greeted him:

"Unslung that extinguisher and turn that nozzle down there," yelled the conductor of the train. It needed no order from Bob, however, for Chick was wheeling into action as his old chum spoke. He was unfamiliar with fire extinguishers, but knew in a general way that all he had to do was to turn it upside down and release the contents.

"Hurry man, or we are done for," admonished Bob, fearful lest the flames be not quenched before the fire spread to the munitions within the car. And right well had he reason to be agitated, for a touch of the flame to the explosive and every mother's son of the train crew would perish as well as the train itself be blotted out by the terrific detonation that inevitably would follow.

Chick by now had the extinguisher in position. Seizing the short length of hose he grasped the nozzle and turned it on the side of the car. But to his dismay and consternation a thin little spurt of the chemical leaped from the nozzle and then subsided altogether.

"What's the matter?" demanded his conductor, now thoroughly alarmed.

"I don't know—it won't work right," was all Chick could answer.

Taking the extinguisher firmly between his hands Chick shook it violently to and fro in his efforts to start the flow of the chemical. Again he tried, and then again, but all in vain.

"It's empty!" he gasped finally.

CHAPTER XX

THE FLAMING POWDER CAR

BOB leaped to the side of his chum and took up the fire extinguisher, rattling it to and fro and muttering to himself something about "some more deviltry." A casual inspection convinced him that Chick was right.

"Empty, indeed!" he exclaimed. By now the smoke had increased in volume. Another tilt of the train on a curve lifted the smoke momentarily but long enough for the two trainmen and the doughboys who stood with them atop the munition cars to see that the whole end of the front car was covered with little tongues of running fire. It was eating slowly to the top of the car.

"Something's got to be done here quick," ejaculated Bob as he flung the empty fire extinguisher from him.

"We've got to cut this car out of the train as quickly as possible—that's all there is to it," he continued. And then acting quickly

on the plan that quickly presented itself to him, Bob gave his orders.

"One of you doughboys hurry forward to the engine and tell Joe Smalley what's doing back here," he ordered. "Tell him we have cut off the rear of the train, from the burning car back to the caboose. Tell him to open her up wide and make a run for it, and that we will drop the coupling on the burning car and make a run for it, leaving the burning car to stop of its own momentum. Hurry now."

One of the infantrymen leaped away as he spoke and dashed along the top of the cars toward the front end of the train. Bob then addressed himself to the other doughboy.

"Get back to the caboose," he commanded, "and when the rear end of the train runs itself out and comes to a stop take a red flag from the signal box and go back a half or three-quarters of a mile. Stop anything that comes along. Stop it at all hazards."

The doughboy hurried away on his mission.

Bob turned to his chum.

"What are you going to do now?" asked Chick as he blinked the smoke out of his eyes.

"Cut out this car," was the terse reply.

Chick now saw clearly through Bob's plan. It was first of all to drop out the rear end of the train and separate it from the burning car. Then when the remainder of the train with the locomotive had drawn away at some distance from the rear end, leaving it to drift to a standstill, the coupling on the other end of the burning car was to be drawn. Thus the burning car would be severed from the front and rear of the train and left to its fate.

But here was a job to test the courage of of the bravest man. Some one had to descend through the smoke and fire that raged between the two cars and pull the coupling pin. It was a situation to test the grit of the pluckiest kind of a man but neither hesitated. Almost in unison they stepped forward to take the daring risk.

"Not on your life, chum," interposed Bob tugging at the sleeve of the flagman. "As conductor of this train I reserve the right to take the chance."

"But, please—" started Chick.

"No, you leave it to me," persisted Bob. "I'll be down there in a jiffy, pull that coupling and take a flying leap into the lap of Mother Earth. You have your job cut out

for you. Go forward to the other end of the car and when we have dropped behind far enough pull the coupling and let 'er go. There's danger for both of us, either way you take it. I may get singed a bit and bashed up a bit getting off, but in the meantime you've got to act quick before the fire eats into the car. Now go to it, and God bless you."

Chick hesitated just an instant, reluctant to leave his old chum to the desperate job. But only for an instant, and then with a hurried hand clasp leaped across the open space through the smoke to the roof of the doomed munition car.

As he stumbled forward Bob drew his gloves tightly over his hands, turned the collar of his tunic up around his neck and ears and sprawled on the top of the car ready for the supreme effort. The smoke curled around his legs as he lowered away over the edge, but drawing a deep inhalation he thrust his legs into the rungs of the ladder and descended the side of the smoking car, his back to the flame of the burning munition carrier.

With presence of mind he kept his head hunched forward close to his chest and

with a deft shifting of his body kept as far as possible from the curling tongues of flame on the car ahead. It was the work of but a moment until he was down close enough to turn and grasp the head of the coupling pin. Running his hand along the slender chain that held it he gave a sharp but mighty tug upwards with all his strength.

The plucky conductor was rewarded when the knuckles of the coupling opened with a snap.

The air hose straightened out taut under the strain of the parted train and then parted with a whistling hiss of escaping air. Crouched on the ledge of the rear car, clinging tenaciously to the brake handle, Bob turned to see the front end of the train leap away and gradually draw off from the stranded rear end. The doughboy had carried out instructions and engineer Smalley was giving No. 4 all the power he could turn into her wheels.

"So far so good," muttered Bob as he straightened up along the side of the car. His first thought was to whether his clothes had taken fire from close contact to the flames. But as he ran his free hand over his shoulders and down his back and limbs he was rejoiced



HE KEPT AS FAR AS POSSIBLE FROM THE CURLING TONGUES
OF FLAME

to find that he had escaped any danger in that direction.

Next he turned his attention to the car to which he was clinging. It had been exposed close up to the flame of the car ahead. In several places it was smoking slightly but he hastily patted these places with his gloved hands, beating out any trace of fire. Satisfied at length that there was no danger on that score he climbed to the top of the car, and with a quick flip of the wheel began setting the hand-brakes, knowing that in a few minutes he would be able to bring the stranded rear end of the train to a standstill.

Gazing down the track he beheld the front end of the train gradually receding into the distance, the flaming end of the burning car standing out conspicuously. Faintly outlined against the skyline was the figure of his flagman to whom he had entrusted the perilous job of cutting out the doomed munition car.

"Good luck to you, chum," he murmured as he bent again over the brake wheel.

They were anxious moments for Chick as he crouched at the front end of the burning car waiting breathlessly for the hiss of the parted hose and the jolting of the train that

would indicate the success of his conductor's effort. Two long blasts sounded from the whistle of the speeding locomotive ahead.

"Attaboy, Smalley," chirped Chick. It was a signal that the engineer was crowding on all steam for a runaway from the burning munition car that the young flagman now was to cut adrift.

It was a ticklish position for the youth. From the other end of the box car curled the flame and smoke and he realized almost any instant the flames might eat their way into the explosives. It was as though he were crouching on the very rim of a volcano that was likely to erupt on a moment's notice. But the Yankee lad was thinking only of saving the train of munitions that were so badly needed by the American troops just going into the trenches at Cantigny.

"We will fight it out on this line if it takes all summer," soliloquized the Brighton boy, recalling an old line from General "Unconditional Surrender" Grant that he had learned in his American history.

In the distance, now half-hidden by a serpentine curve in the track, Chick could see the rear end of the train disappearing. He had watched for his chum to leap away

but had noticed, so far as he could make out the receding cars, that Bob was sticking to his post.

"Here's hoping I hold up my end of the game as well as you did," mused Chick, as though addressing his chum. And without further ado began to carry out his part of the program. As he grasped the hand brake and set his right foot on the top rung of the ladder to descend to his task he heard a call near at hand and looked up to see one of the doughboys of the train guard racing over the top of the car toward him. He was waving his arms excitedly and beckoning back over his shoulder.

"Look what's up ahead!" shouted the infantryman.

Chick, who had started to lower away over the side of the car, paused and followed the line of the doughboy's extended arm. The train had swept into a wide open valley alongside a small stream that drained a fertile farm area. Across the valley swept a heavy May shower bearing directly on the train. The sky to the East was darkened. Forked lightning played through the masses of clouds and the rumble of thunder could be heard above the roar of the train.

"What do you know about that?" exclaimed Chick. Instantly his mind leaped to the thought as to whether the storm might overtake the train and extinguish the flames of the burning munition car.

"Think we can make it?" queried the doughboy anxiously.

"Don't know but I earnestly hope so," replied Chick.

"That was the reason your engineer signalled full speed ahead," explained the infantryman. "He saw the storm just ahead and he's driving like blazes, hoping to drag the burning car within range of the pelting rain drops."

"It's possible, but she's likely to go off any minute and blow us to smithereens," said Wharton as he turned toward the car.

"Do you think the storm will come up to us in time?" continued the doughboy.

Chick was speculating, too, but decided, rain or no rain, to follow out Bob's instructions and cut off the burning car.

"We'll take no chances," was his answer, and immediately climbed down over the side of the car. It was the work of but a minute to reach the coupling and pull out the pin. The train was leaping ahead at the rate of

forty miles an hour or better, and the munition car had attained such momentum along with the rest of the train that for a few minutes it came bobbing right along on the trail of its train.

"Not losing it very fast," commented Chick as he climbed again on top the train and gazed back at the slowly retreating munition car.

"Not yet but soon," said his companion half facetiously. He was a tall Missourian, Calvin Olmstead by name, who had arrived in France within the month with one of the western regiments that had formerly been identified with the National Guard.

"Gotta hand it to you and your conductor for this stunt," declared the westerner. "It took a bit of nerve."

"O, I don't know," countered Chick. "Most any fellow would have done as much."

"Yes, if he had thought about it," replied the Missourian.

Chick now was alternately watching the storm on one hand and the receding munition car on the other—racing toward each other at full speed.

"I hope that rain gets up to her in time," was his earnest expression. "If that carload

of munitions explodes it means goodnight railroad track. Big hole in the roadbed, rails and track all blown to smithereens, and traffic held up indefinitely until roadbed can be rebuilt."

"Yes, and that means holding up American troops and supplies going up to the front, and delaying American participation in the battle," added Olmstead.

"Just the point," was Chick's rejoinder, his words almost lost in the deafening crash of a peal of thunder now close up. And as the two Americans atop the car turned raindrops pelted their faces, born along on a stiff wind.

"Good enough—go to it, Mr. J. Pluvius!" cried Chick with an exclamation of delight.

The burning munition car was dropping steadily behind the runaway train by now, the distance having widened to several hundred yards. It was still coming along under its own momentum but slacking up perceptibly with every quarter mile.

"Funny it don't go off," speculated Wharton, as he flecked a cinder out of the corner of his eye.

Just then the train ran into the welcome embrace of the storm.

CHAPTER XXI

DISCOVERY OF THE SPY

DRIVING sheets of rain closed down on the two Americans crouched on the rear end of the front section of their severed train, but never was a drenching more welcome.

"Hooray! hooray!" chortled Olmstead, the Missourian, as he clouted Wharton good naturedly over the shoulder. "Ten to one the little bonfire back there is sniffed out before the fireworks get a chance to get started."

"I'd like to take your wager, but I'm afraid the rain is too late," was Wharton's reluctant answer.

The young flagman had been waiting in trepidation, expecting any moment to hear a roar of high explosives and to feel the ground under him rocking under the shock of a terrific explosion. He had been hoping, yes praying, that the storm might intervene, but on the other hand it seemed by now

the flames must surely have penetrated within the big box car.

Lightened by the loss of approximately one third of its heavy pull the train was bounding along at a terrific speed so much so that the trainman and the doughboy with difficulty maintained their position. They sat now on the ledge of the car with their backs turned to the storm and holding on to the brake wheel tenaciously.

As the train sped past a signal tower Chick beheld the operator leaning from the window. He had watched the train speed by and now was gazing in the opposite direction, looking for the flaming powder car. It was apparent some other operator further back had sized up the situation as the first section of the train sped by his post pursued by the burning munition car and had telegraphed the word along the line.

"Guess you win," grinned Chick turning to his companion, and meaning, of course, that the rain had probably drenched the burning car and drowned out the flames,

"Looks that way," laughed the Missourian. "I've been in a heap of storms out home in my time but never one that I was gladder to greet than this little French tempest."

"Here, too," remarked Chick, recalling on the moment some football games back at Brighton that had been played on a muddy field in fall rains.

By now the munition car had been left behind and was no longer visible. Taking no chances engineer Smalley kept plugging ahead at full speed for some time and luckily had a clear block that permitted him to race on mile after mile without slacking up.

For twenty minutes, as the rain beat about the train, it kept relentlessly on its way. Smalley kept the whistle of the locomotive blowing almost continually and the alarm brought out the villagers in the small towns through which the runaway train flashed. In the rain they stood gaping at the fast flying munition special and wondering what it was all about.

But as the rain slackened so also the train cut down its speed. Warned by a halting semaphore board that extended its arm horizontally across the track Smalley shut the throttle of No. 4 and clapped on the air brakes. In a few minutes the locomotive came to a full stop. The train had been running at such high speed that it almost passed the signal tower before coming to a full

stop. When at last it had slowed down to a standstill it had all but passed the tower. Chick Wharton and the Missourian dough-boy were the first to greet the towerman.

"What's up?" queried Chick as he approached the telegraph operator. The latter was an American, too, another unit in the all-American detachment of Yankees who had manned this first completed section of the new American railway system in France.

"Your car stopped about six miles back—just got word from the next operator up the line," announced the operator.

"Good enough!" exclaimed Chick. "Has it—"

"Fire out," interrupted the operator. "Seems as though the rain just naturally beat the flames to it."

"What did I tell you!" Olmstead, the Missourian, was in high glee.

From the lips of Wharton the operator heard something in detail of what had happened to the munition special, how the train had come to be parted and how the first section had raced away to avoid being caught in the expected explosion. He then hurried away to report to the train despatcher at Gievray.

In a few minutes engineer Smalley and brakeman Schmidt, followed by several of the doughboys, joined the group in the signal tower. The telegraph instrument was talking noisily as the operator sent in complete details of the narrow escape of the train and how a catastrophe that would have tied up the whole line completely had been averted by the timely arrival of the rain storm.

"What's our orders?" asked Smalley after an interchange of several wire messages.

"You are to back up and pick up the munition car and then continue on back for the rest of your train," answered the operator as he began scrawling on paper, the message that was coming in over the wire. "Operator at Gievray says your conductor in charge of rear end of train has just reported at station about eighteen miles back. They are O. K."

Accordingly the first section of the train started back in search of the quarry that it had so earnestly desired to lose only such a brief time ago. By now the rain had abated and the sky was clear again. Wharton stationed Schmidt midway between the locomotive and the rear end, with the dough-

boys stretched out at intervals between them. At sight of the stranded munition car the signal was to be given the engineer to slow down for the coupling.

It was not long until the munition car was located—stranded on a curve where it had “died” in its lonely journey after having been cut adrift. Less than half a mile away lay a little French village. It seemed the entire population must have turned out, the news having spread from the railway station.

“Well, there she is—didn’t explode after all,” pointed out Olmstead as the train slackened up a bit for the coupling.

“And a mighty good thing, too,” agreed Chick, reassured by the sight of the car standing intact.

When the coupling had been made and the engine signalled to continue backing in quest of the rear end of its train Wharton and Olmstead examined their reclaimed quarry. The whole end of the car was charred to the depth of half an inch and at one place it seemed the flames had all but eaten their way through the wood. The rain, however, had drenched the car thoroughly and prevented the much feared explosion.

Backing mile after mile the first section of the train eventually came in sight of the rear end. Waving his right arm back and forth Chick passed the signal along to the doughboys strung out over the top of the train and in response engineer Smalley began slowing down for the coupling. The two sections of the train came together at last and in a moment Bob and Chick were clasping hands again.

"Good boy, Chick," was Bob's greeting as he wrung the hand of his old chum.

"And bully for you, Bob," answered Wharton.

Forthwith the train was coupled up again and the signal given engineer Smalley "to let her go." Waiting only three minutes for the recall of the doughboy who had been sent back as a relief flagman to guard the rear end of the stalled train the special pulled out again and set itself to make up the time lost in losing and reclaiming the munition car.

Back again in the caboose Bob and Chick had a chance to rehash their experiences. Bob had stuck to the rear end and with the aid of the solitary doughboy and using the hand brakes had been able to bring the few

cars of the cut-off to a standstill after a several miles' "glide."

Naturally the conversation turned on how the car came to be fired. Neither was able to offer a satisfactory explanation, and none of the crew had been able to find any clue that would lead to some definite idea of how the car came to be ignited.

There remained less than a score of miles of the journey into the American yard terminal at Gievray and the special was crowding all speed to get in as fast as possible.

Bob decided, as the end of the run was approaching, to go forward into the locomotive cab in order to get off the engine as soon as the train got into the yard and report to the yard master's office on the experiences of the trip. He left Chick on duty alone in the caboose and started forward.

The young conductor nimbly clambered over the car tops and had soon covered half the train in his journey toward the locomotive. Coming eventually to the end of a string of box cars he prepared to climb down into a long gondola on which was loaded a quantity of high explosive shells. What was his surprise to note the figure of a man in railroad uniform crouched low in the front end of the car.

CHAPTER XXII.]

DEATH TO TRAITORS

CROUCHED low in the car, his back turned to Bob, the mysterious figure had no knowledge of the proximity of the conductor until the latter was almost upon him. Nor had Bob the slightest idea of the identity of the man or of what he was doing. But the young conductor felt almost immediately that whoever he was he was bent upon mischief of some kind.

"What you looking for?" Bob inquired casually, but on the alert for any quick move. Instantly the stooping figure straightened up and turned to face the newcomer.

It was Al Schmidt, the brakeman of the crew. And as he wheeled Bob caught a glimpse of some strange contrivance that the brakeman held in his hand.

For a moment Schmidt was nonplussed and stood like a dazed man unable to articulate speech.

"Why—I—I—was just—"

He stammered weakly in his effort to make the best of the situation.

"Let's see that," demanded Bob extending his hand for the mysterious object that Schmidt held carelessly between thumb and finger. "What is it?" continued the conductor.

Schmidt drew back as Bob stepped forward.

"It's nothing but a stray piece of shrapnel I happened to find as I was making my way over the car," explained the discomfited brakeman awkwardly.

His arm was raised and he was about to hurl the object overboard. But quick as a flash Bob's sturdy right arm shot out and caught the wrist of the brakeman. The impact was so sudden that the missile was jarred loose and clattered to the bottom of the car. A few inches more and it would have fallen outside and been lost.

With his left hand extended Bob stooped to pick up the cylindrical steel object, his right hand free and watching the brakeman out of the corner of his eye. With a snarl of rage Schmidt leaped forward.

"It's none of your business what it is," he growled, and immediately his right hand went for his hip pocket.

But Bob was too quick for him. He had been anticipating just such a move. As the brakeman leaped Bob sidestepped gracefully and whipped out his own Colt automatic. Schmidt stumbled over the edge of a giant shell and all but went down. Recovering his equilibrium, he straightened out again on his feet, just as the steel revolver popped out of his pocket.

"Not this time, Mr. Schmidt: I've got you," cried the young conductor.

Before Schmidt could level and fire Bob had taken aim and pulled the trigger. The sharp snap of a revolver shot sang out and with a cry of pain Schmidt dropped his own firearm. Bob's shot had gone home directly through the wrist of the traitorous brakeman, and a lucky shot it had been, too, for Schmidt was an expert marksman. A running duel between the two would have been to the advantage of Schmidt who was the better shot.

But Schmidt was not to be caught so easily. For an instant he clasped his wounded wrist and then with a stealthy glance at his captor made a leaping dive for the end of the car.

"Hold on there, Schmidt; I said stand by,"

commanded Bob. But Schmidt was not to be intimidated, not even by the free weapon that the conductor dangled carelessly between his fingers. With a desperation born of despair he was intent only on getting away from Bob as quickly as possible. Grasping the rungs of the adjoining boxcar he started to climb upwards.

"Stop or I'll fire," yelled Bob, leveling on the brakeman.

Schmidt's answer was to keep on climbing. Bob pressed on the trigger determined to prevent the escape of the brakeman. He hesitated to kill the man, believing that he was close to a German spy, and that his capture alive was more likely to prove of value than simply to drop him in his tracks. So this time he aimed for the legs of the brakeman with the intention of crippling him and keeping him from getting away. So a second time he fired. This time he missed altogether, for the bullet passed just inside the right knee of the brakeman and was buried in the side of the car. With a cry of rage Bob was after his man.

"I'll stop you if I have to put a plug of lead clean through your heart," he called out sharply and grabbed the ladder to follow

his prey to the top of the train. Bob figured he could run Schmidt into one of the dough-boys and that the brakeman, caught front and rear, would have to surrender.

But a most extraordinary thing happened. Just as Schmidt sprang to the topmost rung of the ladder and set one foot on the roof of the car the train dashed into a bridge spanning a small stream. Schmidt saw it too late. He stooped in a mad effort to avoid being struck but the great wide steel girder caught him full across the side of the head and shoulder and spun him off the car like a paper bag whirled along in a embrace of a tornado.

Bob, coming up the ladder, was startled to see the form of the brakeman suddenly lifted from the edge of the boxcar and flung into the gondola. As the conductor turned he beheld the form of Schmidt hurtle down among the giant shells.

"The judgment of the Almighty," was the thought that flashed through the Brighton boy's head.

Back onto the flat car hastened Bob and to the side of the unconscious brakeman. It took only a glance to prove that Schmidt was done for. He lay like an inanimate heap all

crumpled up in the throes of death. As though by a stroke of fate the bridge had intervened to do the work that Bob had disliked—shooting down a fellow man in cold blood.

Bob bent over the prostrate form and turned the face upward. A great gash showed in the head starting on the top of the cranium and extending down to the neck. The shoulder, too, had been crushed. The man was still breathing, but it was evident his life was fast ebbing and he had but a few minutes to live.

“Not much I can do for you,” mumbled Bob, awed in the presence of death, even though ministering to an enemy.

In answer the eyelids of the brakeman fluttered and opened feebly. Just for an instant the injured man recognized the conductor of the munition train. He was muttering something in a faint whisper. Bob bent over to catch the words.

“Deutschland ueber alles,” whispered the dying man stoically.

Bob shrank back. Vindication of his own judgment was almost more than he could comprehend for the moment. All the time he had suspected Schmidt of being the tool of

the enemy—a spy and traitor in the American camp—and here was proof positive.

“I thought so,” was all he could murmur as he sought the pulse of the dying man. It was all but gone. A few minutes more, a convulsive paroxysm and the body of the brakeman slumped into the last sleep.

“So dies a traitor to the United States of America,” gasped Bob as he turned from the spectacle for a glance into the sky and a sweep of the open French country. “Not by my hand but by the hand of God who laid him low at the moment he was making a last effort to wreck our train.”

That Schmidt had such a purpose in mind Bob was confident of, and turned to inspect the mysterious metal object that the brakeman had dropped just before making his desperate break for liberty. Yes, here it was. Bob picked it up gingerly and was surprised to hear a strange ticking.

“A time bomb,” he gasped as the nature of the contrivance was revealed to him. And such it was. Although Bob had never had an opportunity to study such a dastardly weapon, he recognized it instantly. The mechanism was set in a metal box affair with the face of a clock showing. Once the

high explosive was inserted the bomb could be set to go off at any desired time.

“Trying to blow up the train, and no doubt Schmidt was the man who fired the munition car.” The thoughts raced through the conductor’s mind in quick succession.

Inspecting the bomb closer Bob found it was timed to go off in another hour. Just about the time the munition train would arrive in the big railroad yard and when it would be standing right among valuable freight, possibly near troop trains.

For the moment the young conductor was minded to hurl it from the train but on second thought decided to hold on to it for a few minutes until other members of the train crew had had time to hear the story of Schmidt’s death and to inspect the tell-tale evidence of perfidy.

“Dangerous business, but I’ll keep it a few minutes,” he decided. The train was on the last lap of its hazardous journey and Bob figured now it must be but a few kilometers until the munitions would be landed in the terminal at Gievray. Placing the bomb to one side of the car where it could not be jarred off he turned again to Schmidt, and only a casual inspection was required to

show that the brakeman had gone to face the Great Court Martial.

"Saved from facing an American firing squad!" thought Bob as he drew a handkerchief over the face of the dead man. As he turned away intending to go forward to the locomotive to consult with engineer Smalley he was accosted by Olmstead, the Missourian infantryman, who climbed down over the front boxcar perturbed over the spectacle that had greeted him in the gondola.

"What's all this?" he exclaimed in blank amazement.

And then Bob told him all that had happened, and brought up the time bomb for the inspection of the doughboy.

"Great guns, if that had gone off it would have blown up the greater portion of the train," ejaculated the Missourian. "Loaded with T N T and timed to clip us in less than an hour."

"Just about the time we land in Gievrey," added Bob, in a tone of disgust.

"Do you know anything about these infernal things?" asked the conductor, indicating the bomb.

"Should say I do," replied Olmstead. "Before I enlisted I was attached to the

central postoffice in St. Louis, and had a turn in the secret service. It was part of our game to study infernal machines and the like and to be able to detect them in the mails."

"Then you know something about putting them out of business?" queried Bob.

"Sure thing," answered Olmstead.

Bob explained that he had been on the point of throwing it away when he considered holding it long enough to show to some other member of the crew. Now he expressed the hope that Olmstead would be able to stop the bomb so that it could be held for the inspection of the United States Army secret service. The Missourian quickly responded by deftly extracting the clock mechanism thus rendering the bomb inoperative.

"We'll show them this as proof that Schmidt was trying to destroy us," confided the conductor.

"He's dead, isn't he?" asked Olmstead as he bent over the form of the brakeman.

"Yes, paid the penalty," said Bob, and then explained in detail how Schmidt had climbed to his death in a futile attempt to escape judgment.

While the two Americans were talking

the train slowed down into the yard at Gievray and before long came to a full stop in the upper end of the terminal. At Bob's suggestion the body of Schmidt was lifted from the flat car and carried back to the caboose. As Bob and Olmstead came alongside the cabin Chick leaped down, consternation and amazement written all over his face.

"Who's hurt now?" he inquired.

"Nobody hurt, he's beyond human aid, and it's none other than Schmidt," answered Bob mechanically.

"What? You don't mean—"

And then Chick heard the story of the time bomb and the tragic death of the brakeman.

"A spy all the time," he gasped.

CHAPTER XXIII

"OVER THE TOP" AT CANTIGNY

DO you know who this man was?" The speaker was an American officer of the Intelligence Corps, Captain Cochran, who had been conversing with several French secret service men. They had just completed the examination of the body of Schmidt, the brakeman, who had been killed enroute to Gievray with the American munition train.

The body had been removed from the caboose of conductor Grier's train to the roundhouse where, in the office of the master mechanic of the division, a post-mortem examination had been conducted in the presence of the crew.

"Do you know who he was?" continued Captain Cochran.

No one in the group of American railroad men offered a suggestion other than they had known him as Al Schmidt, a trainman who had enlisted with the Third Regiment of Engineers in Chesterton and come across

the Atlantic to serve with the Yankee engineers in France.

"It is none other than Emil Wolstenholme, a German-born subject, who for a long time has been actively affiliated with the German propagandists in the United States. This man was attached to the staff of Captain Osterhaus, who you will remember was ousted from the United States just before the German Ambassador at Washington was handed his passports. With others he was engaged in the destruction of supplies in America intended for shipment to the allied forces in Europe. He had a hand in blowing up munition plants, factories, warehouses, grain elevators and the like. With his confederates he has been hunted everywhere in America, England and France."

The captain paused for a moment gazing about him at the surprised faces before him. Bob Grier and Chick Wharton, dumbfounded at the revelation, could only stare blankly at each other.

"No doubt he set fire to your train on the way up," continued Captain Cochran.

"And he's probably the man who cut our troop train in two the other night," offered Chick.

"And the same fellow who disabled our aircraft gun that day at Romey when we were attacked by Hun airmen," added Bob.

"And the same despicable person who cut our engine loose that day we were stranded in No Man's Land at Cambrai shortly after arriving on this side," continued Chick.

Captain Cochran wheeled to the trainmen. "What's all this?" he asked, taking out his note book and pencil.

Then in some detail Bob and Chick between them reported all the many incidents that had occurred since their company came over.

"Wolstenholme is your man," interrupted Cochran. "He's one of the slickest we have run across in this war. No doubt the man who lately has been burning supply bases in France and putting equipment out of commission."

"Are you sure he is Wolstenholme?" asked Bob.

"Mr. Conductor, I never was surer of anything in my life," answered the secret service chief. "This is our man and I want to congratulate you for having brought him at last to a corner from which he never can escape. It is probably as well for Wolstenholme that he died as he did, for we have the goods on him and he would have faced a

firing squad in the morning had you brought him in alive."

Cochran beckoned to one of his men.

"That picture, Porter," he requested of one of his aides.

Porter produced a photograph from his pocket.

"The same man, except that he had shaved off his mustache and part of his heavy eyebrows," explained Cochran offering the photograph.

Bob took it and one glance was sufficient to show that Schmidt and the man of the picture were the same. Chick and Joe Smalley surveyed the telltale photograph, each in turn nodding his head.

"Furthermore, we have his finger prints, and they match in every way," continued Captain Cochran. "What's more, this dead man has eight gold-capped teeth, a V-shaped scar on the left knee and a birth-mark just below the left temple, the marks of Wolstenholme."

The boys could not help admire the efficient system by which the secret service men were able to identify their suspects. They wondered, however, how the government had come in possession of the evidence against Wolstenholme.

"Easy enough to explain," said Cochran when the question was propounded. "You see, this fellow Wolstenholme was suspected of having placed time bombs in the coal bunkers of the *Lusitania* on the last trip before the ill-fated trip on which she was sunk by a U-boat. He was arrested with several accomplices, but on his way to the penitentiary at Atlanta escaped from the train near Richmond, Va., by throwing himself out an open window. He had been at bay ever since and we have been scouring the earth for him."

The Brighton boys were completely astounded at the revelation. Not for one moment had they suspected they were associated with one of the worst of the Hun intriguers. But they were extremely well satisfied that they had thwarted Wolstenholme in many of his despicable attempts, and that, furthermore, they had been instrumental in bringing him at last to account.

They had expected to return to their base of operations the same day and were expecting a call to go out the same evening. So they turned in their billets for a bit of rest. But to their surprise there came an order just before evening mess detaining them in Gievray.

For several days they were kept waiting. And then came the order. The callboy got them one evening just as they had concluded mess.

"You are to take a special up to Cantigny tonight," was all he said.

Cantigny! The boys had heard the word mentioned several times the last few days. Supplies, munitions and troops had been rushing up to Gievray with their ultimate destination. It had been whispered about that the Americans were taking over the whole sector on that section of the fighting line and would soon conduct a major military operation of their own. So here was the hope that these two Brighton boys would figure actively in Uncle Sam's first big smash at the Hun. And they were eminently well satisfied to be in on the big coup.

And they were in a manner they had never dreamed of. Their train consisted of one huge flat car. On it towered a massive piece of ordnance that they learned later was one of the 12-inch coast defense guns that Uncle Sam had brought from the United States to train on the Hun. One of a number of such units that the field artillery were to use in the operations against the German lines.

Through the night the American train crew made their way cautiously toward the front over the completed railroad tracks that the Yankee engineers had laid out.

In the grand offensive that followed these guns, as all the world learned later, played a conspicuous part in turning the tide of battle from another German offensive directed against Paris to a retreat that was to terminate finally in the rout of the Kaiser's armies.

Under a wonderful barrage laid down by the American guns the Yankee doughboys in the days that followed went over the top at Cantigny and gave the Hun his first intimate taste of American cold steel. These massive coast defense guns, standing miles back of their own men, shooting one and a half miles for every inch of their caliber, spread dismay among the German ranks.

"Marvelous," yelled Bob to his old chum as the great gun they had brought to the front was pounding away at the enemy many miles away. The range was given by airplane observation, and the targets were completely beyond the horizon; yet the Yankee gunners well knew their shots were landing home on the desired targets.

One of the American officers in charge of the gun explained to the Brighton boys when a breathing spell came in the firing that the projectiles weighed two thousand pounds each; that the projectile went up into the air a distance equal to one-third of the range. The gun could be fired to land its shells on a target twenty-four miles away when desired, he told them; and when the range was twenty-four miles the projectile went up eight miles before starting to fall toward the desired target.

"Hoorah!" yelled Bob at this information. It was the one glorious moment for which the two Brighton railroad recruits had been waiting—for the great turn in the tide of battle when the Hun had been stopped altogether by the mighty American forces and started the other way—toward the Rhine!

Soon came the news of the first American victory at Cantigny; how the doughboys, under the protection of a mighty barrage, had captured the town and driven out the Hun; how the American forces everywhere along the battlefield were pressing forward to the attack; how they were being augmented in number by ever-increasing increments from the bases in France and England as well

as from home; and how the allied forces from Belgium to the Alsatian border were heartened by the victories of their new allies.

"For we're over," Bob Grier sang as he watched the big guns in action.

"And we won't come back till it's over over there," added his old chum, Chick Wharton, with a grin of delight.

And now we leave them, except to add that the two Brighton boys, with the Yanks of the Third Regiment of Engineers, stood right to their jobs during all that epochal summer, relentlessly carrying supplies, munitions and troops from the bases in France to the front line trenches, starting with Cantigny and on through the glorious days at Château Thierry and Fismes to the big battles at St. Mihiel and in the Argonne, ending finally in the operations around Sedan culminating in the acceptance by the worsted Huns of the armistice terms laid down by the victorious allies late in the fall of 1918.

